

TWENTIETH CENTURY PLAYS

BRITISH

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MODERN BRITISH DRAMA

AFTER 1777, the date of *The School for Scandal*, not one acting play of literary merit was written in England for more than a hundred years. London theaters depended on revivals of the classics, paltry farces and melodramas, plunderings from the French, and new plays by such fifth-rate playwrights as the years produced. The Romantic movement at the turn of the century yielded a rich poetry but no actable drama, the Victorian period, which was prodigal in poetry, fiction, and essay, yielded no dramatic literature. In 1880, for example, English drama was intellectually centuries behind other forms of English literature in the age of Huxley, Mill, Carlyle, Ruskin, George Eliot, Meredith, Hardy, Browning, Arnold, and Tennyson, the theater was being served by the trivial plays of Boucicault, Wills, H. J. Byron, Buchanan, Lytton, Reed, and Knowles. Victorian drama was completely divorced from contemporary significance and from literature.

The first ray of hope appeared in the 1860's with the superficially realistic comedies of Tom Robertson. *Society* (1865) and *Caste* (1867) are important only for their beginnings of a sane stage realism; their characterization and dialogue are stogy, and the treatment of "problems" most elementary. Robertson did, however, insist on workable blinds, practicable doors, actual teacups and saucers, rooms with ceilings; stage realism was a necessary step in what William Archer terms the steady advance of dramatic art by the gradual elimination of lyrical and exaggerative elements and the substitution of a "sober and accurate imitation of life." Unfortunately, Robertson was a solitary figure, for his immediate successors—H. J. Byron, James Albery, Tom Taylor, W. G. Wills—either borrowed shamelessly from Scribe and Sardou, or ground out flatulent pieces in the manner of Knowles and Lytton. William Archer speaks thus of these barren years: "As I look back to 'seventy-nine and the early 'eighties, I confess I am puzzled to conceive how anyone with the smallest pretension to intelligence could in those years occupy himself with the English theater. The Robertsonian comedies of the 'sixties had brought with them a little flicker of hope, but it seemed to have died away in the inanities of H. J. Byron [whose trashy saccharine comedy *Our Boys* started in 1875 its phenomenal run of 1,362 nights] and to have left behind it nothing but insipid gloom. The stage was flooded with adaptations of French drama and farce, with illiterate transcriptions of French opera-bouffe, and with the punning vulgarities and idiocies of British burlesque." The priceless extravaganzas of Gilbert and Sullivan formed an oasis in this desert of tawdriness, but they do not belong to the drama proper. The best of Gilbert's non-musical plays, such as *Sweethearts*, if not trivial, are at least quite fragile.

Then in the eighteen eighties two playwrights pulled the theater out of the slough of vulgarity and inaugurated a renaissance which was to restore the drama to its rightful place among the arts. These two playwrights were Arthur Wing Pinero, who was influenced by Ibsen and other Continental pioneers, and Henry Arthur Jones, who strove to make the drama a criticism of life rather than mere innocuous entertainment. In 1884 was produced Jones's *Saints and Sinners*, which, although crudely melodramatic, is the first English play of social criticism. His *Crusaders* (1891) is the first English play to present satirically an entire social group. *The Case of Rebelious Susan* (1894) was the first English high comedy since Sheridan. *The Liars* (1897) is the best English high comedy of the nineteenth century. Jones was also a tireless lecturer and writer for a more

adult theater, for publication and reading of plays, and for abolition of the censorship Pinero electrified the dramatic world with *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* in 1893, a domestic tragedy comparatively bold in theme and honest in treatment and obviously Ibsen-like. Although modern taste leans to his early farces, such as *The Magistrate*, rather than to his pretentious studies of character such as *Iris*, *His House in Order*, and *The Thunderbolt* his serious plays are far more significant as models of a masterly technique and as forcible character studies.

Jones and Pinero were soon joined by a score of playwrights who restored to the drama a vigor and importance it had not enjoyed in more than a century. Between 1892 and 1895, Oscar Wilde wrote four witty comedies, one of which, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is often revived. Haddon Chambers, St. John Hankin, Hubert Henry Davies, and Somerset Maugham followed Jones in the field of high comedy. Stephen Phillips injected some vitality into the almost obsolete poetic drama. Bernard Shaw started the vogue for the thesis play in 1892 with *Widowers' Houses*. Shaw's plays deal primarily with ideas, and only secondarily with characters; he scorns the notion of art for art's sake and regards the theater as a medium for the propagation of his social and economic prejudices. But he is more than pulpiteer: he is a great wit and, perhaps in spite of himself, at times a great artist. One of his distinguished disciples is Granville Barker, whose excellent discursive plays *Waste*, *The Voysey Inheritance*, and *The Madras House* are too static for popular taste. Another disciple was Stanley Houghton, whose thesis play *Hindle Wakes* (1912) is one of the most successful of this genre. John Masefield's tragedies are marked by a somber beauty, especially noteworthy are *The Tragedy of Nan* (1908) and *Melloney Holtspur* (1923). In Ireland, a native drama was encouraged as a vital part of the Celtic revival, and reached its fine flower in the plays of Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, Lord Dunsany, St. John Ervine, Lennox Robinson, and Sean O'Casey.

The most important playwrights in the new century before the war were Synge, Barrie, Galsworthy, and Shaw, of whom Sir James Barrie is the greatest genius. Barrie's work, which ranges from the realistic to the fantastic, from satire to moving tragedy, eludes pat classification. Around the hackneyed triangle situation he builds in *What Every Woman Knows* one of the finest and freshest of English comedies, *The Admirable Crichton*, at once a satire, a high comedy, and a romance, is his sole attempt at intellectual drama, *Dear Brutus* and *Mary Rose* have elements of the supernatural. *Peter Pan*, along with Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, will probably outlive most European plays of the last fifty years. John Galsworthy is a thesis playwright like Shaw, but is more consciously an artist. In most of his plays he succeeds in subordinating idea to character, and successfully achieves objectivity.

Since the World War only Shaw and Somerset Maugham of the older dramatists have been able to maintain their earlier eminence. When one thinks of the noteworthy plays Maugham has written since the war—*The Unknown*, *The Circle*, *The Constant Wife*, *The Sacred Flame*, *For Services Rendered*—he is liable to forget that Maugham has been writing plays since 1902 and, in years at least, does not belong to the younger school. Since the war dramatic literature has continued to flourish, although in close perspective no one playwright seems so significant as Synge, Barrie, Galsworthy, or Shaw. A. A. Milne has continued the Barrie tradition of gentle and whimsical humor, Noel Coward, the *enfant terrible* of the post-war theater, adapts the manner of Restoration comedy to the modern temper and tempo, Rudolph Besler, Clifford Bax, and Gordon Daviot have handled historical themes in the light of modern psychology and have substituted plausible

dialogue for oratory, John Drinkwater has written historical plays in a more conventional manner, but with a simple dignity, Eden Philpotts has written a half-dozen excellent comedies of Devonshire folk, John Van Druten is an assiduous experimenter with the realistic method, Clemence Dane's novels share their unsentimental and uncompromising veracity with her plays, Frederic Lonsdale has devoted his brilliant talent to the comedy of manners. When one thinks of the many other established and promising dramatists—Sutton Vane, R. C. Sheriff, Maurice Browne, Mordaunt Sharp, Ivor Novello, E. M. Delafield, R. M. Harwood, C. L. Anthony, Anthony Armstrong—one takes refuge in the trite "too numerous to mention."

This is surely the golden age of English drama, if we subtract Shakespeare, the Elizabethan period sinks easily to a subordinate position. The dream of the pioneers of the dramatic renaissance has been realized—the drama again provides adult entertainment. The advance has been that of modern literature in general—toward truth and realism. The alarms and excursions of expressionism and kindred novelties have been interesting and for the most part valuable in keeping the dramatic form elastic and living, but never has drama conformed more closely to Aristotle's succinct definition. An imitation of life.

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THE THUNDERBOLT

(1908)

BY

SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JAMES MORTIMORE
ANN, *his wife*
STEPHEN MORTIMORE
LOUISA, *his wife*
THADDEUS MORTIMORE
PHYLLIS, *his wife*
JOYCE } *The Thaddeus Mortimore's children*
CYRIL }
COLONEL PONTING
ROSE, *his wife, nee Mortimore*
HELEN THORNHILL
THE REV GEORGE TRIST
MR VALLANCE, *solicitor, of Singlehampton*
MR ELKIN, *solicitor, of Linchpool*
MR DENYER, *a house-agent*
HEATH, *a man-servant*
A servant girl at Nelson Villas
Two others at "Ivanhoe"

The scene of the First Act is laid at Linchpool, a city in the Midlands. The rest of the action takes place, a month later, in the town of Singlehampton.

SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

ARTHUR WING PINERO was born in London on May 24, 1855, the son of a solicitor. He was educated in private schools and later read for the bar. His enthusiasm for the theater, however, won him away from the study of law before he was twenty and he joined the fine company of Sir Henry Irving to receive, like Shakespeare, a practical education on the boards. A competent but undistinguished actor, he played only minor rôles, and thereby was provided with the necessary leisure to follow his urge for dramatic writing. Like Shakespeare, too, he began his long period of authorship as a hack-writer for the theater, dramatizing popular fiction and adapting plays from the French. From one-act curtain raisers he advanced to farces and sentimental Robertsonian comedies such as *Sweet Lavender*, finally to such serious and memorable problem plays as *The Profligate* and *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*. In the twentieth century he has written his finest plays—*Iris*, *His House in Order*, *Mid-Channel*, and *The Thunderbolt*. In recent years he has had little success on the stage (except in the revival of early farces or such a museum piece as *Trelawney of the "Wells"*). Never a profound student of human life, he has remained essentially a Victorian in a changing world; he makes no effort to interpret. Pinero died in 1934.

In the history of the English drama there is no more expert maker of plays than Pinero. From his first play in 1877 to his most recent, audiences and readers have relished his superb craftsmanship. The well-knit plots, the steady crescendo of interest, the exciting climaxes and forceful endings have called forth the opprobrious adjective "well-made" in an age when expressionistic and "talky" plays win most critical approval. The artificiality of Pinero's work is apparent, but only the most churlish of critics can deny their historical importance in the advance of the modern drama, or overlook the excellent gallery of Pinero portraits and his gripping stories. Much of the recent depreciation of Pinero is unfair, grossly so the common dismissal of his work as "theatrical" (It would seem that the contemptuous use of "theatrical" is a bit irrational when applied to pieces designed for performance in the theater!). Nevertheless, the assertion that Pinero has taken the stage too seriously and life not seriously enough is not without justification, with his great technical gifts there must be some reason for his being only an important playwright and not a great dramatist like Chekhov, Rostand, and Barrie.

The plays of Pinero most worth reading are *The Magistrate* (1885), a diverting farce, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893), an old-fashioned but notable problem play which established the Ibsen influence on the English drama, *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899), a bright comedy of manners with an extraordinarily dramatic climax, *Iris* (1901), a flawless example of the "well-made" tragedy, *His House in Order* (1906), a serious study of a second marriage, refreshingly free from the "problems" that weigh heavily on most Edwardian dramas, *The Thunderbolt* (1908), and *Mid-Channel* (1909), a grim, unpalatable story of a wrecked marriage.

The Thunderbolt, perhaps Pinero's finest play (by no means the most popular) and one of the best pre-war plays of the modern English drama, is relatively free of those faults that weaken and date many of this dramatist's serious plays—the emphasis on social problems that have paled in significance, the obtrusion of theatrical machinery, and sentimental concessions to popular taste. *The Thunderbolt* is a masterpiece of careful realism, a bitter satire on universal weaknesses, yet the play is primarily a study of character.

revelation under the stress of circumstance, and not patently a satire as is Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, which it resembles. The relative unpopularity of the play is due to its drab and cynical humor, which arouses anything but comfortable laughter, to its lack of those elements of romance and sentiment obligatory in a "success" (*The Thunderbolt* is one of the few great plays without a love story or sex interest), and to the remorseless delineation of the morals and manners of a group to which many are conscious of belonging. The motif of the play is the ancient one of the lost will, but the truth and firmness of the satire and characterization bring new vitality to the old theme. The technical skill for which Pinero is renowned is shown in the expert handling of a large number of characters, in the effective preparation for Phyllis's confession, and its repetition by Thaddeus with no diminution of interest, and in the skilful final act, which escapes being anticlimactic. Few will cavil at William Archer's comment on the third act: "The act in which the thunderbolt falls into the midst of the family council is one of the most thrilling pieces of drama ever conceived." When the play was first performed, it was denounced as "an insult to the provinces", a former Lord Mayor of Sheffield called it "an unwarrantable attack on provincial life." Such denunciations are tributes to the tart satire and the veracious portraiture in the play.

THE THUNDERBOLT

ACT I

A large, oblong room, situated on the ground floor and furnished as a library, in the residence of the late Edward Mortimore, in Linchpool

At the back are three sashed windows, slightly recessed, with Venetian blinds. There is a chair in each recess. At the farther end of the right-hand wall a door opens from the hall, the remaining part of the wall being occupied by a long dwarf-bookcase. This bookcase finishes at each end with a cupboard, and on the top of each cupboard stands a lamp. The keys of the cupboards are in their locks.

On the left-hand side of the room, in the middle of the wall, is a fireplace with a fender-stool before it, and on either side of the fireplace there is a tall bookcase with glazed doors. A high-backed armchair faces the fireplace at the farther end. A smoking-table with the usual accessories, a chair, and a settee stand at the nearer end of the fireplace, a few feet from the wall.

Almost in the center of the room there is a big knee-hole writing-table with a lamp upon it. On the farther side of the table is a writing-chair. Another chair stands beside the table.

On the right, near the dwarf-bookcase, there is a circular library-table on which are strewn books, newspapers, and magazines. Round this table a settee and three chairs are arranged.

The furniture and decorations, without exhibiting any special refinement of taste, are rich and massive.

The Venetian blinds are down, and the room is in semi-darkness. What light there is proceeds from the bright sunshine visible through the slats.

Seated about the room, as if waiting for somebody to arrive, are JAMES and ANN MORTIMORE, STEPHEN and LOUISA, THADDEUS and PHYLIS, and COLONEL PONTING and ROSE. The ladies are wearing their hats and gloves. Everybody is in the sort of black which people hurriedly muster while regular mourning is in

the making—in the case of the MORTIMORES, the black being added to apparel of a less somber kind. All speak in subdued voices.

ROSE [a lady of forty-four, fashionably dressed and coiffured and with a suspiciously blooming complexion—on the settee on the left, fanning herself] Oh, the heat! I'm stifled.

LOUISA [on the right—forty-six, a spare, thin-voiced woman] Mayn't we have a window open?

ANN [beside the writing-table—a stolid, corpulent woman of fifty] I don't think we ought to have a window open.

JAMES [at the writing-table—a burly, thick-set man, a little older than his wife, with iron-gray hair and beard and a craft band round his sleeve] Phew! Why not, mother?

ANN It isn't usual in a house of mourning—except in the room where the—

PONTING [in the armchair before the fireplace—fifty-five, short, stout, apoplectic] Rubbish! [Dabbing his brow] I beg your pardon—it's like the Black Hole of Calcutta.

THADDEUS [rising from the settee on the right, where he is sitting with PHYLIS—a meek, careworn man of two-and-forty] Shall I open one a little way?

STEPHEN [on the farther side of the library-table—forty-nine, bald, stooping, with red rims to his eyes, wearing spectacles] Do, Tad.

[THADDEUS goes to the window on the right and opens it.]

THADDEUS [from behind the Venetian blind] Here's a fly.

JAMES [taking out his watch as he rises] That'll be Crake. Half-past eleven. He's in good time.

THADDEUS [looking into the street] It isn't Crake. It's a young fellow.

JAMES Young fellow?

THADDEUS [emerging] It's Crake's partner.

JAMES His partner?

STEPHEN Crake has sent Vallance.

JAMES What's he done that for? Why

hasn't he come himself? This young man doesn't know anything about our family

ANN He'll know the law, James

JAMES Oh, the law's clear enough, Mother

[After a short silence, HEATH, a middle-aged man-servant, appears, followed by VALLANCE VALLANCE is a young man of about five-and-thirty]

HEATH Mr Vallance

JAMES [advancing to VALLANCE as HEATH retires] Good morning

VALLANCE Good morning [Inquiringly] Mr Mortimore?

JAMES James Mortimore

VALLANCE Mr Crake had your telegram yesterday evening

JAMES Yes, he answered it, telling us to expect him

VALLANCE He's obliged to go to London on business He's very sorry He thought I'd better run through

JAMES Oh, well—glad to see you [Introducing the others] My wife My sister Rose—Mrs Ponting My sister-in-law, Mrs Stephen Mortimore My sister-in-law, Mrs Thaddeus My brother Stephen

STEPHEN [rising] Mr Vallance was pointed out to me at the Institute the other night [Shaking hands with VALLANCE] You left by the eight forty-seven?

VALLANCE Yes I changed at Mirtlesfield

JAMES Colonel Ponting—my brother-in-law [PONTING, who has risen, nods to VALLANCE and joins ROSE] My younger brother, Thaddeus

THADDEUS [who has moved away to the left] How d'ye do?

JAMES [putting VALLANCE into the chair before the writing-table and switching on the light of the lamp] You sit yourself down there [To everybody] Who's to be spokesman?

STEPHEN [joining LOUISA] Oh, you explain matters, Jim

[LOUISA makes way for STEPHEN, transferring herself to another chair so that her husband may be nearer VALLANCE]

JAMES [to PONTING] Colonel?

PONTING [sitting by ROSE] Certainly, you do the talking, Mortimore

JAMES [sitting in the middle of the room, astride a chair, which he fetches from the window on the right] Well, Mr Vallance, the reason we wired you yesterday—wired Mr Crake, rather—asking him to meet us here this morning, is this Something has happened here in Linchpool

which makes it necessary for us to obtain a little legal assistance

VALLANCE Yes?

JAMES Not that we anticipate legal difficulties, whichever way the affair shapes At the same time we consider it advisable that we should be represented by our own solicitor—a solicitor who has our interests at heart, and nobody's interests but ours [Looking around] Isn't that it?

STEPHEN We want our interests watched—our interests exclusively

PONTING Watched—that's it I'm speaking for my wife, of course

ROSE [with a languid drawl] Yes watched We should like our interests watched

JAMES [to VALLANCE] These are the facts I'll start with a bit of history We Mortimores are one of the oldest, and, I'm bold enough to say, one of the most respected, families in Singlehampton You're a newcomer to the town, so I'm obliged to tell you things I shouldn't have to tell Crake, who's been the family's solicitor for years Four generations of Mortimores—I'm not counting our youngsters, who make a fifth—four generations of Mortimores have been born in Singlehampton, and the majority of 'em have earned their daily bread there

* VALLANCE Indeed?

JAMES Yes, sir, indeed Now, then [Pointing to the writing-table] Writing-paper's in the middle drawer [VALLANCE takes a sheet of paper from the drawer and arranges it before him] My dear father and mother—both passed away—had five children, four sons and a daughter I'm the second son, then comes Stephen, then Rose—Mrs Colonel Ponting, then Thaddeus You see us all round you

VALLANCE [selecting a pen] Five children, you said?

JAMES Five The eldest of us was Ned—Edward—

STEPHEN Edward Thomas Mortimore

JAMES Edward cut himself adrift from Singlehampton six-and-twenty years ago He died at a quarter-past three yesterday morning

STEPHEN Upstairs

JAMES We're in his house

STEPHEN We lay him to rest in the cemetery here on Monday

VALLANCE [sympathetically] I was reading in the train, in one of the Linchpool papers—

JAMES Oh, they've got it in all their papers

VALLANCE Mr Mortimore, the brewer?

JAMES The same Aye, he was a big man in Linchpool

STEPHEN A very big man

JAMES And, what's more, a very wealthy one, there's no doubt about that Well, we can't find a will, Mr Vallance

VALLANCE Really?

JAMES To all appearances, my brother's left no will—died intestate

VALLANCE Unmarried?

JAMES Unmarried, a bachelor Now, then, sir—just to satisfy my good lady—in the event of no will cropping up, what becomes of my poor brother's property?

VALLANCE It depends upon what the estate consists of As much of it as is real estate would go to the heir-at-law—in this instance, the eldest surviving brother

PONTING [*impatiently*] Yes, yes, but it's all personal estate—personal estate, every bit of it

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*] The Colonel's right It's personal estate entirely, so we gather The Colonel and I were pumping Elkin's managing-clerk about it this morning

VALLANCE Elkin?

JAMES Elkin, Son, and Tullis

STEPHEN Mr Elkin has acted as my poor brother's solicitor for the last fifteen years

JAMES And *he's* never made a will for Ned

STEPHEN Nor heard my brother mention the existence of one

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*] Well? In the case of personal estate—?

VALLANCE In that case, equal division between next-of-kin

JAMES That's us—me, and my brothers, and my sister?

VALLANCE Yes

JAMES [*to ANN*] What did I tell you, Ann? [*To the rest*] What did I tell everybody?

[*STEPHEN polishes his spectacles, and*

PONTING pulls at his mustache, vigorously ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA

resettle themselves in their seats with

great contentment]

VALLANCE [*writing*] "Edward"—[*looking up*—Thomas? [JAMES nods]

"Thomas Mortimore—"

JAMES Of 3 Cannon Row and Horton Lane—

STEPHEN Horton Lane is where the brewery is

JAMES Linchpool, brewer

STEPHEN "Gentleman" is the more

correct description The business was converted into a company in nineteen hundred and four

LOUISA Gentleman, ah! What a gentlemanly man he was!

ANN A perfect gentleman in every respect

ROSE Most gentlemanlike, poor dear thing

PONTING Must have been I never saw him—but must have been

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*] Gentleman, deceased—

STEPHEN Died, June the twentieth—

JAMES Aged fifty-three Two years my senior

VALLANCE [*with due mournfulness*] No older? [*Writing*] You are James—

JAMES James Henry "Ivanhoe," Claybrook Road, and Victoria Yard, Singlehampton, builder and contractor

ANN My husband is a parish guardian and a rural-district councilman

JAMES Never mind that, Mother

ANN Eight years treasurer of the Institute, and one of the founders of the Singlehampton and Claybrook Temperance League

LOUISA Stephen was one of the founders of the League, too—weren't you, Stephen?

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*] Stephen Philip Mortimore, 11 The Crescent, and 32 King Street, Singlehampton, printer and publisher, editor and proprietor of our Singlehampton *Times and Mirror*

LOUISA Author of the "History of Singlehampton and Its Surroundings"—

STEPHEN All right, Lou

LOUISA With Ordnance Map

JAMES Rose Emily Rackstraw Ponting—

ROSE My mother was a Rackstraw

JAMES Wife of Arthur Everard Ponting, West Sussex Regiment, Colonel, retired, 17a Coningsby Place, South Belgravia, London That's the lot

ANN No—

JAMES Oh, there's Tad [*To VALLANCE*] Thaddeus John Mortimore—

[*THADDEUS is standing, looking on, with his elbows resting upon the back of the chair before the fireplace*]

THADDEUS Don't forget me, Jim

JAMES 6 Nelson Villas, Singlehampton, professor of music Any further particulars, Mr Vallance?

VALLANCE [*finishing writing and leaning back in his chair*] May I ask, Mr Mortimore, what terms you and your sis

ter and brothers were on with the late Mr Mortimore?

JAMES Terms?

VALLANCE What I mean is, your late brother was a man of more than ordinary intelligence, he must have known who his estate would benefit, in the event of his dying intestate

JAMES [*with a nod*] Aye

VALLANCE My point is, was he on such terms with you as to make it reasonably probable that he should have desired his estate to pass to those who are here?

JAMES [*rubbing his beard*] Reasonably probable?

STEPHEN Certainly

PONTING In my opinion, certainly

JAMES [*looking at the others*] He sent for us when he was near his end—

STEPHEN Showing that old sores were healed—thoroughly healed—as far as he was concerned

VALLANCE Old sores?

JAMES He wouldn't have done that if he hadn't had a fondness for his family—eh?

ANN Of course not

LOUISA Of course he wouldn't

PONTING Quite so

VALLANCE Then, I take it, there had been—er—?

STEPHEN An estrangement Yes, there had

JAMES Oh, I'm not one for keeping anything in the background Up to a day or two before his death, we hadn't been on what you'd call terms with my brother for many years, Mr Vallance

STEPHEN Unhappily

JAMES *De mortuis*—how's it go—?

STEPHEN *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*

JAMES Well, plain English is good enough for me [*To VALLANCE*] But I don't attempt to deny it—at one time of his life my poor brother Edward was a bit of a scamp, sir

STEPHEN A little racketsy—a little wild Young men will be young men

ANN [*shaking her head*] I've a grown-up son myself

LOUISA [*inconsequently*] And there are two sides to every question I always say—don't I, Stephen—?

STEPHEN Yes, yes, yes

LOUISA There are two sides to every question

JAMES [*to VALLANCE*] No, sir, after Edward cleared out of Singlehampton, we didn't see him again, any of us, till about fifteen years back Then he came to settle

here, in this city, and bought Cordingly's brewery

LOUISA Only forty miles away from his birthplace

STEPHEN Forty-two miles

LOUISA That was fate

STEPHEN Chance

LOUISA I don't know the difference between chance and fate

STEPHEN [*irritably*] No, you don't, Lou

JAMES Then some of us used to knock up against him occasionally—generally on the line, at Mirtlesfield junction But it was only a nod, or a how-d'ye-do, we got from him, and it never struck us till last Tuesday morning that he kept a soft corner in his heart for us all

VALLANCE Tuesday—?

ANN First post

JAMES We had a letter from Elkin, telling us that poor Ned was seriously ill, and saying that he was willing to shake hands with the principal members of the family, if they chose to come through to Lunchpool

STEPHEN Thank God we came

JAMES Aye, thank God

ANN and LOUISA Thank God

ROSE [*affectedly*] It will always be a sorrow to me that I didn't get down till it was too late I shall never cease to reproach myself

JAMES [*indulgently*] Oh, well, you're a woman o' fashion, Rose

ROSE [*with a smiler*] Still, if I had guessed the end was as near as it was, I'd have given up my social engagements without a murmur [*Appealing to PONTING*] Toby—!

PONTING Without a murmur—without a murmur, both of us would

VALLANCE [*rising, putting his notes into his pocketbook as he speaks*] I think it would perhaps be as well that I should meet Mr Elkin

STEPHEN That's the plan

JAMES [*rising*] Just what I was going to propose

STEPHEN Elkin knows that we have communicated with our solicitor

JAMES [*looking at his watch*] He's gone around to the Safe Deposit Company in Lemon Street

STEPHEN His latest idea is that my brother may have rented a safe there

PONTING Preposterous Never heard anything more grotesque

JAMES The old gentleman will want to drag the river Lunch next

PONTING As if a man of wealth and

position, with safes and strong-rooms of his own, would deposit his will in a place of that sort 'Pon my word, it's outrageous of Elkin

STEPHEN It does seem rather extravagant

ROSE Absurd

VALLANCE [*coming forward*] We must remember that it's the duty of all concerned to use every possible means of discovery [*To JAMES*] Your brother had an office at the brewery?

JAMES Elkin and I turned that inside-out yesterday

STEPHEN In the presence of Mr Holt and Mr Friswell, two of the directors

VALLANCE And his bank—?

JAMES London City and Midland Four tin boxes We've been through 'em

STEPHEN The most likely place of deposit, I should have thought, was the safe in this room

PONTING Exactly The will would have been there if there had been a will at all

[*JAMES switches on the light of the lamp which stands above the cupboard at the farther end of the dwarf-bookcase*]

JAMES [*opening the cupboard and revealing a safe*] Yes, this is where my brother's private papers are

STEPHEN This was his library and sanctum

JAMES [*listening as he shuts the cupboard door*] Hallo! [*Opening the room door a few inches and peering into the hall*] Here is Elkin

[*There is a slight general movement denoting intense interest and suspense ANN gets to her feet JAMES closes the door and comes forward a little—grimly*]

Well! Hey! I wonder whether he's found anything in Lemon Street?

PONTING [*clutching ROSE'S shoulder and dropping back into his chair—under his breath*] Good God!

ANN [*staring at her husband*] James—!

JAMES [*sternly*] Go and sit down, Mother [*ANN retreats and seats herself beside ROSE*] If he has, we ought to feel glad, that's how we ought to feel

STEPHEN [*resentfully*] Of course we ought That's how we shall feel

JAMES Poor old Ned! It's his wishes we've got to consider—[*returning to the door*]—his wishes [*Opening the door again*] Come in, Mr Elkin Waiting for you, sir [*He admits ELKIN, who is a*

gray-haired, elderly man of sixty He presents VALLANCE] Mr Vallance—Crake and Vallance, Singlehampton, our solicitors [*ELKIN advances and shakes hands with VALLANCE*] Mr Vallance has just run over to see how we're getting on

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE, gemally*] I don't go often to Singlehampton nowadays I recollect the time, Mr Vallance, when the whole of the south side of the town was meadow-land Would you believe it—meadow-land! And where they've built the new hospital, old Dicky Dunn, the farmer, used to graze his cattle [*JAMES touches his sleeve He turns to JAMES*] Eh?

JAMES [*rather huskily*] Excuse me Any luck?

ELKIN Luck?

JAMES In Lemon Street Find anything?

ELKIN [*shaking his head*] No There is nothing there in your brother's name [*Again there is a general movement, but this time of relief*] It was worth trying

JAMES Oh, it was worth trying

STEPHEN [*heartily*] Everything's worth trying

PONTING [*jumping up*] Everything Mustn't leave a stone unturned

[*The strain being over, ROSE and ANN rise and go to the fireplace, where PONTING joins them THADDEUS moves away and seats himself at the center window*]

ELKIN [*sitting beside the writing-table*] This is a puzzling state of affairs, Mr Vallance

VALLANCE Oh, come, Mr Elkin!

ELKIN I don't want to appear uncivil to these ladies and gentlemen—very puzzling

VALLANCE Scarcely what one would have expected, perhaps, but what is there that's puzzling about it?

JAMES [*standing by ELKIN*] People have died intestate before to-day, Mr Elkin

STEPHEN It's a common enough occurrence

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*] I understand you acted for the late Mr Mortimore for a great many years?

ELKIN Ever since he came to Linch pool

VALLANCE His most prosperous years [*ELKIN assents silently*]

JAMES When he was making money to leave

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*] And the sub-

ject of a will was never broached between you?

ELKIN I won't say that I've thrown out a hint or two at different times

VALLANCE Without any response on his part?

ELKIN Without any practical response, I admit [*JAMES and STEPHEN shrug their shoulders*] But he must have employed other solicitors previous to my connection with him I can't trace his having done so, but no commercial man gets to eight-and-thirty without having something to do with us chaps

VALLANCE [*sitting on the settee on the left*] Assuming a will of long standing, he may have destroyed it, may he not, recently?

ELKIN Recently?

VALLANCE Quite recently Here we have a man at variance with his family and dangerously ill What do we find him doing? We find him summoning his relatives to his bedside and becoming reconciled to them—

JAMES Completely reconciled

STEPHEN Completely

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE*] At my persuasion I put pressure on him to send for his belongings

VALLANCE Indeed? Granting that, isn't it reasonable to suppose that, subsequent to this reconciliation—?

ELKIN Oh, no, he destroyed no document of any description after he took to his bed That I've ascertained

VALLANCE Well, theorizing is of no use, is it? We have to deal with the simple fact, Mr Elkin

JAMES Yes, that's all we have to deal with

STEPHEN The simple fact

ELKIN No will

PONTING [*who, with the rest, has been following the conversation between ELKIN and VALLANCE*] No will

ELKIN [*after a pause*] Do you know, Mr Vallance, there is one thing I shouldn't have been unprepared for?

VALLANCE What?

ELKIN A will drawn by another solicitor, behind my back, during my association with Mr Mortimore

VALLANCE Behind your back?

ELKIN He was a most attractive creature—one of the most engaging and one of the ablest, I've ever come across, but he was remarkably secretive with me in matters relating to his private affairs—remarkably secretive

VALLANCE Secretive?

ELKIN Reserved, if you like Why, it wasn't till a few days before his death—last Saturday—it wasn't till last Saturday that he first spoke to me about this child of his

VALLANCE Child?

ELKIN This young lady we are going to see presently

VALLANCE [*looking at JAMES and STEPHEN*] Oh, I—I haven't heard anything of her

ELKIN Bless me, haven't you been told?

JAMES [*uncomfortably*] We hadn't got as far as that with Mr Vallance

STEPHEN [*clearing his throat*] Mr Elkin did not think fit to inform us of her existence till yesterday

JAMES [*looking at his watch*] Twelve o'clock she's due, isn't she?

ELKIN [*to James*] You fixed the hour [*to VALLANCE*] I wrote to her at the same time that I communicated with her brothers Unfortunately, she was away, visiting

STEPHEN She's studying painting at one of those art-schools in Paris

ELKIN She arrived last night Mrs Elkin and I received her Only four-and-twenty A nice girl

VALLANCE Is her mother living?

ELKIN No

JAMES The mother was a person of the name of Thornhill

STEPHEN Calling herself Thornhill—some woman in London She died when the child was quite small

JAMES [*with a jerk of the head towards the safe*] There's a bundle of the mother's letters in the safe

ELKIN This meeting with the family is my arranging As matters stand, Miss Thornhill is absolutely unprovided for, Mr Vallance And there was the utmost affection between Mr Mortimore and his daughter—as he acknowledged her to be—undoubtedly Now you won't grumble at me for my use of the word "puzzling"?

VALLANCE [*looking round*] I am sure my clients, should the responsibility ultimately rest with them, will do what is just and fitting with regard to the young lady

JAMES More than just—more than just, if it's left to me

STEPHEN We should be only too anxious to behave in a liberal manner, Mr Vallance

LOUISA We're parents ourselves—all except Colonel and Mrs Ponting

ANN My own girl—my Cissy—is nearly four-and-twenty

ROSE [*seated upon the fender-stool*] I suppose we should have to make her an allowance of sorts, shouldn't we?

JAMES A monthly allowance

STEPHEN Monthly or quarterly

PONTING Yes, but this art-school in Paris—you've no conception what that kind of fun runs into

JAMES Schooling doesn't go on forever, Colonel

PONTING But it'll lead to an *atelier*—a studio—if you're not careful

ROSE The art-school could be dropped, surely?

STEPHEN Perhaps the art-school isn't strictly necessary

ROSE And she has an address in a most expensive quarter of Paris—didn't you say, Jim?

JAMES The Colonel says it's a swell locality

PONTING Most expensive The father—if he *was* her father—seems to have squandered money on her

STEPHEN Well, well, we shall see what's to be done

PONTING Squandered money on her recklessly

JAMES Yes, yes, we'll see, Colonel, we'll see

[*PHYLLIS, who has taken no part in what has been going on, suddenly rises. She is a woman of thirty-five, white-faced and faded, but with decided traces of beauty. Everybody looks at her in surprise*]

PHYLLIS [*falteringly*] I—I beg your pardon—

LOUISA [*startled*] Good gracious me Phyllis!

PHYLLIS [*gaining firmness as she proceeds*] I beg your pardon With every respect for Rose and Colonel Ponting, if we come into Edward Mortimore's money, we mustn't let it make an atom of difference to the child

LOUISA Really, Phyllis!

STEPHEN [*stiffly*] My dear Phyllis—

JAMES [*half amused, half contemptuously*] Oh, we mustn't, mustn't we, Phyllis?

PHYLLIS He was awfully devoted to her in his lifetime, it turns out Colonel Ponting and Rose ought to remember that

PONTING [*walking away in umbrage to the window on the left, followed by ROSE*] Thank you, Mrs Thaddeus

THADDEUS [*having risen and come to the writing-table*] Phyl—Phyl—

PHYLLIS [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*]

Jim—Stephen—you couldn't stint the girl after pocketing your brother's money, you couldn't do it!

ANN James—

JAMES Eh, Mother?

ANN I don't think we need to be taught our duty by Phyllis

STEPHEN [*rising and going over to the fireplace*] Frankly, I don't think we need

LOUISA [*following him*] Before Mr Elkin and Mr Vallance!

THADDEUS Stephen—Lou—you don't understand Phyl

JAMES It isn't for want of plain speaking, Tad

THADDEUS [*sitting at the writing-table*] No, but listen—Jim—

JAMES [*joining those at the fireplace*] Blessed if I've ever been spoken to in this style in my life!

THADDEUS Jim, listen If we come into Ned's money, we come into his debts into the bargain There are no assets without liabilities The girl's a debt—a big debt, as it were Well, what does she cost? Five hundred a year? Six—seven—eight hundred a year? What's it matter? What would a thousand a year matter? Whatever Ned could afford, we could, amongst us Why he should have neglected to make Miss Thornhill independent is a mystery—I'm with you there, Mr Elkin Perhaps his sending for us, and shaking hands with us as he did, was his way of giving her into our charge Heaven knows what was in his mind But this is certain—if it falls to our lot to administer to Ned's estate, we administer, not only to the money, but to the girl, and the art-school, and her comfortable lodgings, and anything else in reason There's nothing offensive in our saying this

ELKIN Not in the least

THADDEUS [*with a deprecating little laugh*] Ha! We don't often put our oar into family discussions, Phyl and I Stephen—[*turning in his chair*]—Rosie—

JAMES [*looking down on THADDEUS—grinning*] Hallo, Tad! Why, I've always had the credit of being the speaker o' the family You're developing all of a sudden

[*HEATH enters*]

HEATH [*looking round the room*] Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore—?

THADDEUS [*pointing to PHYLLIS, who is now seated in a chair on the right*] Here she is

HEATH [*in a hushed voice*] Two young ladies from Roper's to fit Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore with her mourning

THADDEUS [*rising*] They weren't

ready for Phyllis at ten o'clock [*Over his shoulder as he joins PHYLLIS at the door*] Hope you don't object to their waiting on her here

HEATH [*to THADDEUS*] On the first floor, sir

[*PHYLLIS and THADDEUS go out HEATH is following them*]

VALLANCE [*to HEATH, rising*] Er— [*to ELKIN*] What's his name?

ELKIN [*calling to HEATH, who returns*] Heath—

VALLANCE [*going to HEATH*] Have you a room where Mr Elkin and I can be alone for a few minutes?

HEATH There's the dining-room, sir

VALLANCE [*turning to ELKIN*] Shall we have a little chat together?

ELKIN [*rising*] By all means

VALLANCE [*to the others*] Will you excuse us?

ELKIN [*taking VALLANCE'S arm*] Come along [*Passing out with VALLANCE—regretfully*] Ah, Heath, the dining-room

HEATH [*as he disappears, closing the door*] Yes, Mr Elkin, that's over, sir

JAMES What have those two got to say to each other on the quiet in such a deuce of a hurry?

PONTING My dear good friends, I beg you won't think me too presuming

JAMES [*sourly*] What is it, Colonel?

PONTING But you mustn't, you really mustn't allow yourselves to be dictated to—bullied—

JAMES Bullied?

PONTING Into doing anything that isn't perfectly agreeable to you

STEPHEN You consider we're being bullied, Colonel?

JAMES If it comes to bullying—

PONTING It has come to bullying, if I'm any judge of bullying First, you have Mr Elkin, a meddlesome, obstructive—

STEPHEN [*sitting at the writing-table*] Oh, he's obviously antagonistic to us, obviously

PONTING Of course he is He sniffs a little job of work over this Miss Thornhill It's his policy to cram Miss Thornhill down our throats That's his game

JAMES [*between his teeth*] By George—!

PONTING And then you get Mr Vallance, your own lawyer—

JAMES [*sitting*] Aye, I'm a bit disappointed with Vallance

PONTING Dogmatizing about what is just and what is fitting—

STEPHEN Hear, hear, Colonel! You

don't pay a solicitor to take sides against you

JAMES As if we couldn't be trusted to do the fair thing of our own accord!

PONTING The upshot being that Miss Thornhill, supported openly by the one and tacitly by the other, will be marching in here and—and—

JAMES Kicking up a rumpus

PONTING I shouldn't be surprised

LOUISA A rumpus! She wouldn't dare!

ANN That would be terrible—a rumpus—

ROSE I shouldn't be surprised either You mustn't expect too much, you know, from a girl who's

STEPHEN [*interpreting ROSE'S shrug*] Illegitimate

ANN No, I suppose we oughtn't to expect her to be the same as our children

PONTING And finally, to cap it all, you have your brother Thaddeus—your brother—

JAMES Ha, yes! Tad obliged us with a pretty stiff lecture, didn't he?

LOUISA So did Phyllis

ANN [*seating herself beside LOUISA*] It was Phyllis who began it

ROSE [*swaying herself to and fro upon the back of the chair next to the writing-table*] Tad's wife! She's a suitable person to be lectured by, I must say

STEPHEN Poor old Tad! He was only trying to excuse her rudeness

ROSE Just fancy! The two Tads sharing equally with ourselves!

STEPHEN It is curious, at first sight

ROSE Extraordinary

STEPHEN But, naturally, the law makes no distinctions

ROSE No It was the lady's method of announcing that she's as good as we are

JAMES Tad and his wife with forty or fifty thousand pound, p'raps, to play with! So the world wags

ROSE Positively maddening

LOUISA We shall see Phyllis aping us now more than ever

ANN And making that boy and girl of hers still more conceited

LOUISA They needn't let apartments any longer, that's a mercy

ANN We shall be spared that disgrace

JAMES Strong language, Mother!

STEPHEN Hardly disgrace You can't call the curate of their parish church a lodger in the ordinary sense of the term

LOUISA Phyllis's girl might make a match of it with Mr Trist in a couple of years' time She's fifteen

ANN A forward fifteen

ROSE It's a fairy story A woman who's brought nothing but the worst of luck to Tad from the day he married her!

JAMES The devil's luck

STEPHEN Been his ruin—his ruin professionally—without the shadow of a doubt

LOUISA Such a good-looking fellow he used to be, too

ANN Handsome

LOUISA [*archly*] It was Tad I fell in love with, Stephen—not with you

STEPHEN And popular *He'd* have had the conductorship of the choral societies but for his mistake, Rawlinson would never have had it Councillor Pritchard admitted as much at a committee-meeting

PONTING [*seated upon the settee on the right*] Butcher—the wife's father—wasn't he?

ROSE Just as bad Old Burdock kept a grocer's shop at the corner of East Street

STEPHEN West Street

ROSE West Street, was it? She's the common or garden over-educated petty-tradesman's daughter

JAMES [*oratorically*] No, no, you can't overeducate, Rose You can *wrongly* educate —

ROSE Oh, don't start that, Jim [*To PONTING*] She was a pupil of Tad's

STEPHEN [*holding up his hands*] Marriage—marriage —!

LOUISA Stephen!

JAMES If it isn't the right sort o' marriage!

STEPHEN Poor old Tad!

JAMES *Rich* old Tad to-day, though! [*Chuckling*] Ha, ha!

ROSE [*glancing at the door*] Sssh!

[*THADDEUS returns The others look down their noses or at distant objects*]

THADDEUS [*closing the door and advancing*] I—I hope you're not angry with Phyllis

STEPHEN [*resignedly*] Angry?

THADDEUS Or with me

ANN Anger would be out of place in a house of mourning

JAMES Women's tongues, Tad!

STEPHEN Yes, the ladies—they will make mischief

LOUISA Not every woman, Stephen

THADDEUS Phyllis hasn't the slightest desire to make mischief Why on earth should Phyl want to make mischief? [*Sitting in the chair in the middle of the room*] She's a little nervy—a little unstrung, that's what's the matter with, Phyllis

LOUISA There's no cause for *her* to be specially upset that I can think of

ANN *She* didn't know Edward in the old days as we did

THADDEUS No, but being with him on Wednesday night, when the change came—that's affected her very deeply, poor girl, bowled her over [*To ROSE*] She helped to nurse him

ROSE [*indifferently*] One of the nurses cracked up, didn't she?

JAMES The night-nurse

THADDEUS [*nodding*] Sent word late on Wednesday afternoon that she couldn't attend to her duties

STEPHEN The day-nurse knocking off at eight o'clock! Dreadful!

THADDEUS There we were, rushing about all over the place—all over the place—to find a substitute

JAMES And no success

THADDEUS [*rubbing his knees*] That's where Phyllis came in handy, there's where Phyl came in handy

LOUISA Phyllis hadn't more than two hours of it, while Ann and I were resting, when all's said and done

ANN Not more than two or three hours alone, at the outside

THADDEUS No, but, as I say, it was during those two or three hours that the change set in It's been a shock to her

LOUISA The truth is, Phyllis delights in making a fuss, Tad

THADDEUS Phyl!

ANN She loves to make a martyr of herself

THADDEUS Phyl does!

LOUISA *You* delight to make a martyr of her, then, perhaps that's it

ANN I suppose you do it to hide her faults

LOUISA It would be far more sensible of you, Tad, to strive to correct them —

ANN If it's not too late—far more sensible

LOUISA And teach her a different system of managing her home —

ANN And how to bring up her children more in keeping with their position —

LOUISA With less pride and display

ANN They treat their *cousins* precisely like dirt

LOUISA Dirt under the foot

ANN Why Phyllis can't be satisfied with a cook-general passes my comprehension —

ROSE [*wearily*] Oh, shut up!

JAMES Steady, Mother!

THADDEUS [*looking at them all*] Ah, you've never liked Phyllis from the beginning, any of you

LOUISA Never liked her!

THADDEUS Never cottoned to her, never appreciated her Oh, I know—old Mr Burdock's shop! [Simply] Well, Ann, well, Lou, shop or no shop, there's no better wife—no better woman—breathing than Phyl

LOUISA One may like a person without being blind to shortcomings

ANN Nobody's flawless, nobody

LOUISA There are two sides to every person as well as to every question, I always maintain

THADDEUS However, maybe it won't matter so much in the future It hasn't made things easier for us in the past [Snapping his fingers softly] But now—

STEPHEN [caustically] Henceforth you and your wife will be above the critical opinion of others, eh, Tad?

JAMES Aye, Tad's come into money now Mind what you're at, Mother! Be careful, Lou! Tad's come into money

THADDEUS [in a quiet voice, but clenching his hands tightly] My God, I hope I have! I'm not a hypocrite, Jim My God, I hope I have!

[The door opens and ELKIN appears]

ELKIN Miss Thornhill is here [There is a general movement THADDEUS walks away to the fireplace JAMES, STEPHEN, and PONTING also rise and ROSE joins PONTING at the library-table ANN and LOUISA shake out their skirts formidablely, their husbands taking up a position near them HELEN THORNHILL enters, followed by VALLANCE, who closes the door ELKIN presents HELEN] Miss Thornhill [To HELEN, pointing to the group on the left] These gentlemen are the late Mr Mortimore's brothers [Pointing to ROSE] His sister

HELEN [a graceful, brilliant-looking girl with perfectly refined manners, wearing an elegant traveling-dress—almost inaudibly] Oh, yes

ELKIN [with a wave of the hand towards the others] Members of the family by marriage

[She sits, at ELKIN'S invitation, in the chair beside the writing-table The attitude of the JAMES and STEPHEN MORTIMORES, and of the PONTINGS, undergoes a marked change]

JAMES [after a pause, advancing a step or two] I'm the eldest brother [Awkwardly] James, I am

STEPHEN [drawing attention to himself by an uneasy cough] Stephen

ANN [humbly] I'm Mrs James

LOUISA [in the same tone] Mrs Stephen

ROSE [seating herself at the left of the library-table] Rose—Mrs Ponting [Glancing at PONTING] My husband

THADDEUS [now standing behind the writing-table] Thaddeus My wife is upstairs trying on her—

[He checks himself and retreats, again sitting at the center window]

[HELEN receives these various announcements with a dignified inclination of the head]

JAMES [seating himself at the writing-table, to HELEN] Tired, I dessay?

HELEN A little

STEPHEN [bringing forward the armchair from the fireplace] You weren't in Paris, Mr Elkin tells us, when his letter—?

HELEN No, I was nearly a nine hours' journey from Paris, staying with friends at St Etienne

ROSE A pity

LOUISA Great pity

HELEN Mr Elkin's letter was re-posted and reached me on Wednesday I got back to Paris that night

ELKIN [seating himself beside her] And had a hard day's traveling again yesterday

STEPHEN [sitting in the armchair] She must be worn out

ANN Indeed she must

PONTING [sitting by ROSE] Hot weather, too Most exhausting

ELKIN [to HELEN] And you were out and about this morning with Mrs Elkin before eight, I heard?

HELEN She brought me round here

ELKIN [sympathetically] Ah, yes

JAMES Round here? [ELKIN motions significantly towards the ceiling] Oh—aye [After another pause, to HELEN] When did you see him last—alive?

HELEN In April He spent Easter with me [Unobtrusively opening a little bag which she carries and taking out a handkerchief] We always spent our holidays together [Drying her eyes] I was to have met him at Rouen on the fifteenth of next month, we were going to Etretat

ELKIN [after a further silence] Er—h'm!—the principal business we are here to discuss is, I presume, the question of Miss Thornhill's future

HELEN [quickly] Oh, no, please

ELKIN No?

HELEN If you don't mind, I would rather my future were taken for granted, Mr Elkin, without any discussion

ELKIN Taken for granted?

HELEN I am no worse off than thou—

sands of other young women who are suddenly thrown upon their own resources I'm a great deal better off than many, for there's a calling already open to me—art My prospects don't daunt me in the least

ELKIN No, no, nobody wants to discourage you —

HELEN [*interrupting ELKIN*] I confess—I confess I am disappointed—hurt—that Father hasn't made even a slight provision for me—not for the money's sake, but because—because I meant so much to him, I've always believed He *would* have made me secure if he had lived longer, I am convinced

ELKIN [*soothingly*] Not improbable, not improbable

HELEN But I don't intend to let my mind dwell on that What I do intend to think is that, in leaving me with merely my education and the capacity for earning my living, he has done more for my happiness—my real happiness—than if he had left me every penny he possessed With no incentive to work, I might have drifted by and by into an idle, aimless life I *should* have done so

STEPHEN A very rational view to take of it

PONTING Admirable!

[*There is a nodding of heads and a murmur of approval from the ladies*]

ELKIN Very admirable and praiseworthy [*To the others, diplomatically*] But we are not to conclude that Miss Thornhill declines to entertain the idea of some—some arrangement which would enable her to embark upon her artistic career —

HELEN Yes, you are I don't need assistance, and I couldn't accept it [*Flaring up*] I will accept nothing that hasn't come to me direct from my father—nothing [*Softening*] But I am none the less grateful to you, dear Mr Elkin—[*looking round*]—to everybody—for this kindness

STEPHEN [*with a sigh*] So be it, so be it, if it must be so

PONTING We don't wish to force assistance upon Miss Thornhill

STEPHEN On the contrary, we respect her independence of character

[*ELKIN shrugs his shoulders at VAL-LANCE, who is now seated upon the settee on the right*]

JAMES [*stroking his beard*] Art—art You've been studying painting, haven't you?

HELEN At Juhan's, in the Rue de Berri, for three years—for pleasure, I imagined

JAMES [*glancing furtively at ANN*]

D'ye do oil portraits—family groups and so on?

HELEN I'm not very successful as a colorist Black and white is what I am best at

JAMES [*dubiously*] Black and white —

STEPHEN Is there much demand for that form of art in Paris?

HELEN Paris? Oh, I shall come to London

JAMES London, eh?

HELEN My drawing isn't quite good enough for over there It's only good enough for England I shall sell my jewelry and furniture—I'm sharing a flat in the Avenue de Messine with an American girl—and that will carry me along excellently till I'm fairly started Oh, I shall do very well

ROSE I live in London My house will be somewhere for you to drop into, whenever you feel inclined

HELEN Thank you

PONTING [*pulling at his mustache*] Often as you like—often as you like —

ROSE [*loftily*] As I am in "society," as they call it, that will be nice for you

JAMES [*to ANN*] Now, then, Mother, don't you be behindhand —

ANN I'm sure I shall be very pleased if Miss Thornton—[*a murmur*]—Thornhill— If she'll pay us a visit We're homely people, but she and Cissy would play tennis all day long

LOUISA If she does come to Singlehampton, she mustn't go away without staying a day or two in the Crescent [*To HELEN*] Do you play chess, dear? [*HELEN shakes her head*] My husband will teach you—won't you, Stephen?

STEPHEN Honored

THADDEUS [*having risen and come forward*] I'm sorry my wife isn't here We should be grieved if Miss Thornhill left us out in the cold

HELEN [*looking at him with interest*] You are Father's musical brother, aren't you?

THADDEUS Yes—Tad

HELEN [*with a faint smile*] I promise not to leave you out in the cold [*To everybody*] I can only repeat, I am most grateful [*To ELKIN, about to rise*] Mrs Elkin is waiting for me, to take me to the dressmaker —

ELKIN [*detaining her*] One moment—one moment [*To the others*] Gentlemen, Mr Vallance and I have had our little talk, and we agree that the proper course to pursue in the matter of the late Mr Mortimore's estate is to proceed at once to

insert an advertisement in the public journals

JAMES An advertisement?

ELKIN With the object of obtaining information respecting any will which he may have made at any time

JAMES [after a pause] Oh—very good

STEPHEN [coldly] Does Mr Vallance really advise that this is the proper course?

[VALLANCE rises, and THADDEUS again retires]

VALLANCE [assentingly] In the peculiar circumstances of the case

ELKIN We propose to go a step further We propose to circularize

JAMES Circularize?

PONTING [disturbed] What the devil's that?

ELKIN We propose to address a circular to every solicitor in the law-list asking for such information

HELEN Is that necessary?

ELKIN Mr Vallance will tell us —

VALLANCE It comes under the head of taking all reasonable measures to find a will

HELEN [looking round] I—I sincerely hope that no one will think that it is on my behalf that Mr Elkin —

ELKIN [checking her] My dear, these are formal, and amicable, proceedings, to which everybody, we suggest, should be a party

VALLANCE Everybody

ELKIN [invitingly] Everybody

JAMES [breaking a chilly silence] All right Go ahead, Mr Elkin [To STEPHEN] We're willing?

STEPHEN Why not, why not? Rose —?

ROSE [hastily] Oh, certainly

VALLANCE [to JAMES] I have your authority, Mr Mortmore, for acting with Mr Elkin in this matter?

JAMES You have, sir

ELKIN [to VALLANCE, rising] Will you come round to my office with me?

[HELEN rises with ELKIN, whereupon the other men get to their feet ANN and LOUISA also rise as HELEN comes to them and offers her hand]

ANN [shaking hands] We're at the Grand Hotel —

LOUISA [shaking hands] So am I and my husband

HELEN I'll call, if I may

[She shakes hands with STEPHEN and JAMES and goes to ROSE]

ROSE [rising to shake hands with her] We're at the Grand, too Colonel Ponting and I would be delighted —

PONTING Delighted

[HELEN merely bows to PONTING, then she shakes hands with THADDEUS and passes out into the hall]

ELKIN [having opened the door for HELEN—to everybody, generally] Good day, good day

JAMES and STEPHEN Good day, Mr Elkin Good day

[ELKIN follows HELEN]

VALLANCE [at the door—to JAMES and STEPHEN] Where can I see you later?

JAMES The Grand Food at half-past one

VALLANCE Thank you very much

[He bows to the ladies and withdraws, closing the door after him]

PONTING [pacing the room indignantly] I wouldn't give the fellow so much as a dry biscuit!

[There is a general break-up, ANN and LOUISA joining ROSE on the right]

JAMES [pacifically] Oh, there's no occasion to upset yourself, Colonel

PONTING [on the left] I wouldn't! I wouldn't! He's against us on every point

JAMES Let 'em advertise, if it amuses 'em [In an outburst] Let 'em advertise and circularize till they're blue in the face

ROSE [with a shrill laugh] Jim! Ha! ha! ha!

ANN and LOUISA [solemnly] Hus—s—sh!

JAMES [dropping to a whisper] Oh, I—I forgot

STEPHEN Yes, yes, yes, it's nothing more than a lawyer's trick, to swell their bill of costs

JAMES Of course it isn't, of course it isn't [Passing his hand under his beard] I want some air, Mother Get out o' this

ANN [fastening her mantle] You've an appointment at the tailor's, remember

STEPHEN [looking at his watch] So have I

JAMES Are you coming, Colonel? [Finding himself in the center of a group—with a change of manner] I say what a beautiful girl, this girl of Ned's!

STEPHEN Exceedingly

PONTING [producing his cigarette case] Charming young woman

ANN and LOUISA Lovely A lovely girl

ROSE Quite presentable

JAMES And she doesn't ask a shilling of us—not a bob

STEPHEN She impressed me enormously

PONTING [*with an unlighted cigarette in his mouth*] Charming, charming

JAMES Ned ought to have left her a bit, he ought to have left her a bit [*Resolutely*] Mother—we'll have her down home

STEPHEN We must tell some fib or other as to who she is Yes, we'll show her a little hospitality

PONTING And Rose—in London That'll make it up to her

ROSE Yes, that'll make it up to her [*The ladies move into the hall, the men follow JAMES is standing in the doorway and speaks to THADDEUS, who is now seated at the writing-table*]

JAMES Tad, I'll stand you and your wife a good lunch One-thirty

[*THADDEUS nods acceptance, and JAMES goes after the others THADDEUS rises and, looking through the blind of the middle window, watches them depart Presently PHYLLIS appears, putting on her gloves*]

PHYLLIS [*at the door, drawing a breath of relief*] They've gone

THADDEUS [*turning*] Is that you, Phyl?

PHYLLIS [*coming farther into the room*] I've been waiting on the landing

THADDEUS Why didn't you come back, dear? You've missed Miss Thornhill

PHYLLIS [*walking away to the left, working at the fingers of a glove*] Yes, I—I know

THADDEUS The very person we were all here to meet

PHYLLIS I—I came over nervous [*Eagerly*] What is she like?

THADDEUS Such an aristocratic-looking girl

PHYLLIS Is she—is she?

THADDEUS I'll tell you all about her by and by [*Pushing the door to and coming to PHYLLIS, anxiously*] What do you think they're going to do now, Phyl?

PHYLLIS Who?

THADDEUS The lawyers They're going to advertise

PHYLLIS Advertise?

THADDEUS In the papers—to try to discover a will

PHYLLIS I—I suppose that's a mere matter of form?

THADDEUS Elkin and Vallance say so According to Stephen, it's simply a lawyer's dodge to run up costs [*Brightening*] Anyhow, we mustn't complain, where a big estate is involved

PHYLLIS Is it—such a—big estate?

THADDEUS Guess

PHYLLIS I can't

THADDEUS [*coming closer to her*] I heard Elkin's managing-clerk tell Jim and the Colonel this morning that poor Ned may have died worth anything between a hundred and fifty and two hundred thousand pounds

PHYLLIS [*faintly*] Two hundred thousand—!

THADDEUS Yes

PHYLLIS Oh, Tad—!

[*She sits, on the settee on the left, leaning her head upon her hands*]

THADDEUS Splitting the difference, and allowing for death duties, our share would be close upon forty thousand To be on the safe side, put it at thirty-nine thousand Thirty-nine thousand pounds!

[*Moving about the room excitedly*] I've been reckoning Invest that at four per cent—one is justified in a calculating upon a four per cent basis—invest thirty-nine thousand at four per cent, and there you have an income of over fifteen hundred a year Fifteen hundred a year! [*Returning to her*] When we die, seven hundred and fifty a year for Joyce, seven hundred and fifty for Cyril! [*She rises quickly and clings to him, burying her head upon his shoulder and clutching at the lapel of his coat*] Poor old lady! [*Putting his arms round her*] Poor old lady! You've gone through such a lot, haven't you?

PHYLLIS [*sobbing*] We both have

THADDEUS Sixteen years of it

PHYLLIS Sixteen years

THADDEUS Of struggle—struggle and failure

PHYLLIS Failure brought upon you by your wife—by me

THADDEUS Nonsense—nonsense—

PHYLLIS You always call it nonsense, you know it's true If you hadn't married me—if you'd married a girl of better family—you wouldn't have lost caste in the town—

THADDEUS Hush, hush! Don't cry, Phyl, don't cry, old lady

PHYLLIS You'd have had the choral societies, and the High School, and the organ at All Saints, you'd have been at the top of the tree long ago You know you would!

THADDEUS [*rallying her*] And if you hadn't married me you might have captivated a gay young officer at Claybrook and got to London eventually Rose did it, and you might have done it So that makes us quits Don't cry

PHYLLIS [*gradually regaining her com-*

posure] There was a young fellow at the barracks who was after me

THADDEUS [*nodding*] You were prettier than Rose, a smarter girl altogether

PHYLLIS [*drying her eyes*] I'll be smart again now, dear I'm only thirty-five What's thirty-five?

THADDEUS The children won't swallow up everything now, will they?

PHYLLIS No, but Joyce shall look sweeter and dancier than ever, though

THADDEUS Cyril shall have a first-class, public-school education, that I'm determined upon There's Rugby—Rugby's the nearest—or Malvern—

PHYLLIS [*with a catch in her breath*] Oh, but Tad—we'll leave Singlehampton, won't we?

THADDEUS Permanently?

PHYLLIS Yes—yes—

THADDEUS Won't that be rather a mistake?

PHYLLIS A mistake!

THADDEUS Just as we're able to hold up our heads in the town

PHYLLIS We should never be able to hold up our heads in Singlehampton If we were clothed in gold we should still be lepers underneath, the curse would still rest on us

THADDEUS [*bewildered*] But where—where shall we—?

PHYLLIS I don't care—anywhere [*Passionately*] Anywhere where I'm not sneered at for bringing up my children decently, and for making my home more tasteful than my neighbors', anywhere where it isn't known that I'm the daughter of a small shopkeeper—the daughter of "old Burdock of West Street"! [*Imploringly*] O Tad—

THADDEUS You're right Nothing is ever forgiven you in the place you're born in We'll clear out

PHYLLIS [*slipping her arm through his*] When—when will you get me away?

THADDEUS Directly, directly, as soon as the lawyers—

[*He pauses, looking at her blankly*]

PHYLLIS [*frightened*] What's the matter?

THADDEUS We—we're talking as if—as if Ned's money is already ours!

PHYLLIS [*withdrawing her arm—steadily*] It will be

THADDEUS Will it, do you think?

PHYLLIS [*with an expressionless face*]

1 prophesy—it will be

[*HEATH enters, and, seeing THADDEUS and PHYLLIS, draws back*]

HEATH I'm sorry, sir I thought the room was empty

THADDEUS We're going [*As he and PHYLLIS pass out into the hall*] Don't come to the door

HEATH Thank you, sir

[*HEATH quietly and methodically replaces the chair at the window on the right Then, after a last look round, he switches off the lights and leaves the room again in gloom*]

ACT II

It is a month later

The drawing-room of a modern, cheaply built villa, the residence of the THADDEUS MORTIMORES, in the town of Singlehampton In the wall at the back are two windows One is a bay-window provided with a window-seat, the other, the window on the right, opens to the ground into a small garden At the bottom of the garden a paling runs from left to right, and in the paling there is a gate which gives access to a narrow lane Beyond are the gardens and backs of other houses

The fireplace is on the right of the room, the door on the left A grand piano-forte, with its head towards the windows, and a music-stool occupy the middle of the room On the right of the music-stool there is an armchair, and against the piano, facing the fireplace, there is a settee Another settee is at the farther end of the fireplace and on the nearer side, opposite this settee, is an armchair Also on the right hand there is a round table An ottoman, opposing the settee by the piano, stands close to the table

At the end of the piano there is a small table with an armchair on its right and left, and on the extreme left of the room stands another armchair with a still smaller table beside it On the left of the bay-window there is a writing-table, and in front of the writing-table, but turned to the window, a chair Other articles of furniture fill spaces against the walls

There is a mirror over the fireplace and a clock on the mantel-shelf, and lying upon the round table are a hat and a pair of gloves belonging to HELEN Some flowers in pots hide the empty grate

The room and everything in the room are eloquent of narrow means, if not of

actual poverty But the way in which the cheap furniture is dressed up, and the manner of its arrangement about the room, gave evidence of taste and refinement

The garden is full of the bright sunshine of a fine July afternoon

HELEN, engaged in making a sketch of JOYCE and CYRIL, who are facing her, is sitting in the chair on the right of the table at the end of the piano A drawing-block is on her knees and a box of crayons is on the table at her elbow JOYCE is a slim, serious girl of fifteen, CYRIL, a handsome boy of fourteen

HELEN and the THADDEUS MORTIMORES are dressed in mourning, but not oppressively so

THADDEUS is at the piano, accompanying a sentimental ballad which TRIST, standing beside him, is singing TRIST is a big, healthy-looking, curly-headed young fellow in somewhat shabby clerical clothes PHYLLIS, looking more haggard than when last seen, is on the settee by the fireplace Her hands lie idly upon some needlework in her lap, and she is in deep thought

THADDEUS [starting afresh with the symphony] Once more

HELEN [to the children, softly] Do you want a rest?

CYRIL [standing close to his sister] No, thanks

JOYCE [in the chair at the extreme left] Oh, no, don't give us a rest

[As the symphony ends, the door opens a little way, and JAMES pops his head in]

JAMES Hallo!

THADDEUS Hallo, Jim!

[JAMES enters, followed by STEPHEN, both with an air of bustle and self-importance They also are in mourning, are gloved, and are wearing their hats, which they remove on entering]

STEPHEN May we come in?

JAMES Good afternoon, Mr Trist

STEPHEN How do you do, Mr Trist?

TRIST [to JAMES and STEPHEN]

How are you, how are you?

JAMES [to the children, kissing JOYCE] Well, kids! [Shaking hands with HELEN] Well, my dear! [Crossing to PHYLLIS, who rises] Don't get up, Phyllis What's this? You're not very bob-bish, I hear

PHYLLIS [nervously] It's nothing

THADDEUS [tudging his music] She's sleeping badly just now, poor old lady

STEPHEN [who has greeted HELEN and the children—to PHYLLIS] Oh, Phyllis, Louisa has discovered a wonderful cure for sleeplessness at the herbalist's in Crown Street A few dried leaves merely You strew them under the bed and the effect is magical

JAMES Glass of warm milk's my remedy—

STEPHEN Eighteen-pence an ounce, it costs

JAMES Not that sleeplessness bothers me

PHYLLIS [sitting on the ottoman and resuming her work—to STEPHEN] Thank you for telling me about it

JAMES [to HELEN] Making quite a long stay here

HELEN [smiling] Am I not?

STEPHEN You and Phyllis, Tad, are more honored than we were at the Crescent

JAMES Or we were at the "Ivanhoe" She was only a couple of nights with us

STEPHEN Less with us She arrived one morning and left the next

JAMES [to HELEN] Been in Nelson Villas over a week, haven't you?

HELEN [touching her drawing] Is it more than a week?

JAMES [looking at HELEN'S drawing] Taking the youngsters' portraits, too

STEPHEN [also looking at the drawing] H'm! I suppose children are difficult subjects

TRIST [moving towards the door—to HELEN] Miss Thornhill, don't forget your engagement

HELEN [to JOYCE and CYRIL] Mr Trist is going to treat us to the flower-show by and by

CYRIL Good man!

JOYCE Oh, Mr Trist!

STEPHEN [to TRIST] Not driving you away, I hope?

TRIST [at the door] No, no, I've some work to do

[He withdraws STEPHEN puts his hat on the top of the piano]

JAMES [after watching the door close] Decent sort o' young man, that, nothing of the lodger about him

STEPHEN I've always said so [To THADDEUS, lowering his voice] Mr Trist knows how—er—h'm—poor Edward left his affairs?

THADDEUS Everybody does, it's all over the town

STEPHEN [*resignedly*] Yes, impossible to keep it to ourselves

JAMES Thanks to their precious advertisement [*To JOYCE and CYRIL, loudly*] Now, then, children, be off with you! I want to talk to your father and mother

JOYCE [*to HELEN*] Will you excuse us?

CYRIL Awfully sorry, Helen

[*The children pass through the open window into the garden and disappear. HELEN rises, and, having laid her drawing-block aside, is following them*]

JAMES [*to HELEN*] Not you, my dear. You're welcome to hear our business

HELEN Oh, no, you mustn't let me intrude

STEPHEN I think Helen ought to hear it [*HELEN pauses, standing by the table on the right*] I think she ought to be made aware of what's going on

JAMES Tad—

THADDEUS [*coming forward*] Eh?

JAMES The meeting's to take place this afternoon

[*PHYLLIS looks up from her work suddenly, with parted lips*]

THADDEUS This afternoon?

STEPHEN At four o'clock

THADDEUS [*glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece*] It's past three now

JAMES [*placing his hat on the table at the end of the piano and sitting at the left of the table*] It's been fixed up at last rather in a hurry

STEPHEN [*sitting in the chair at the extreme left*] We didn't get Elkin's letter, telling us he was coming through, till this morning

THADDEUS You might have notified us earlier, though, one of you. Just like you fellows!

STEPHEN [*waving his arms*] On the day I go to press I have quite enough to remember

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, roughly*] It's your holiday-time, what have you got to do? An hour's notice is as good as a week's

STEPHEN [*to HELEN*] This is a meeting of the family, Helen, to be held at my brother's house, for the purpose of—
er—

HELEN [*advancing a little*] Winding matters up?

JAMES For the purpose of receiving Elkin and Vallance's report

HELEN [*keenly*] And to—?

JAMES And to decide upon the ad-

ministration of the estate on behalf of the next-of-kin

HELEN In my words—wind matters up [*With an appearance of cheerfulness*] Which means an end to a month's suspense, doesn't it?

THADDEUS [*apologetically*] A not very satisfactory end to yours

HELEN To mine? [*With an effort*] Oh, I—I've suffered no suspense, Mr Tad. Mr Elkin has kept me informed of the result of the advertising and the circularizing from the beginning

THADDEUS But there has been no result

HELEN No result is the result

STEPHEN Exactly

[*During the following talk, HELEN moves away and seats herself in the chair by the head of the piano. PHYLLIS has resumed her work again bending over it so that her face is almost hidden*]

THADDEUS [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*] Will Rose and the Colonel be down?

JAMES We're on our way to the station to meet 'em

STEPHEN [*butterfly*] Ha! Will they be down?

THADDEUS You didn't overlook them, evidently

JAMES [*with a growl*] No, the gallant Colonel doesn't give us much chance of overlooking him

STEPHEN Colonel Ponting might be the only person interested, judging by the tone he adopts

JAMES A nice life he's been leading us lately

STEPHEN Elkin and Vallance are sick of him

JAMES Hasn't two penny pieces to clunk together, that's the size of it

STEPHEN A man may be hard up and yet behave with dignity

JAMES I expect the decorators are asking for a bit on the nail

THADDEUS [*sitting on the right of the table at the end of the piano*] Decorators?

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*] Haven't you heard?

THADDEUS No

STEPHEN The magnificent house they've taken in Carlos Place—?

JAMES Close to Berkeley Square

STEPHEN [*correcting JAMES'S pronunciation*] Berkeley Square

JAMES Stables and motor-garridge at the back

STEPHEN Oh, yes, they're decorating

and furnishing most elaborately Lou had a note from Rose a day or two since

JAMES He'll strip my sister of every penny she's come into, if she doesn't look out

STEPHEN The gross indelicacy of the thing is what offends me We have been content to remain passive

JAMES And I fancy our plans and projects are as important as the Colonel's

STEPHEN I should assume so

JAMES [*to STEPHEN, with a jerk of the thumb towards THADDEUS*] Shall I ?

STEPHEN No harm in it now

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, leaning forward—unimpressively*] Tad

THADDEUS What?

JAMES That land at the bottom of Gordon Street, where the allotment grounds are—

THADDEUS Yes?

JAMES It's mine

THADDEUS Yours, Jim?

JAMES It belongs to me I've signed the contract and paid a deposit

THADDEUS What do you intend to do with it?

JAMES What should I intend to do with it—eat it? I intend to build there—build the finest avenue of houses in Singlehampton [*Rising and going to the piano, where he traces a plan on the lid with his finger*] Look here! [*THADDEUS joins him and watches the tracing of the plan*] Here's Gordon Street Here's the pub at the corner I come along here—straight along here—to Albert Terrace Opposite Albert Terrace I take in Clark's piano factory, and where Clark's factory stands I lay out an ornamental garden with a fountain in the middle of it On I go at a curve, to avoid the playground of Fothergill's school, till I reach Bolton's store He stops me, but I'll squeeze him out some day, as sure as my name's James Henry! [*To THADDEUS*] D'y'e see?

THADDEUS [*uncomfortably, eyeing HELEN*] Splendid, splendid

JAMES [*moving round the head of the piano to the right*] Poor old Ned! Hal! My brother won't have done so badly by his native town after all

THADDEUS [*under his breath, trying to remind JAMES of HELEN'S presence*] Jim—Jim—

JAMES [*obliviously, coming upon HELEN*] D'y'e know the spot we're talking about, my dear?

HELEN No

JAMES You must get 'em to walk you

down there [*To PHYLLIS*] You trot her down there, Phyllis

PHYLLIS [*without raising her eyes from her work*] I will

STEPHEN [*to JAMES*] You haven't told them everything, Jim

JAMES [*sitting upon the settee by the piano*] Haven't I? [*Mopping his brow*] Oh, your offices—

STEPHEN [*to everybody*] It isn't of the greatest importance, perhaps, but it's part of James's scheme to erect an exceptionally noble building in the new road to provide adequate printing and publishing offices for the *Times* and *Mirror*

THADDEUS What, you're not deserting King Street, Stephen?

STEPHEN [*rising and walking to the fireplace*] Yes, I've had enough of those cramped, poky premises

THADDEUS They are inconvenient

STEPHEN [*on the hearthrug, facing the others*] And, to be perfectly frank, I've had enough of Mr Hammond and the *Courier*

THADDEUS I don't blame you there The *Courier* is atrociously personal occasionally

STEPHEN [*pompously*] I don't say it because Hammond is, in a manner, my rival—I'm not so small-minded as that—but I do say that he is a vulgar man and that the *Courier* is a vulgar and mischievous journal

JAMES He's up to date, though, is Mister Freddy Hammond

STEPHEN His plant is slightly more modern than mine, I admit

JAMES [*chuckling*] Aye, you'll be able to present those antediluvian printing-presses of yours to the museum as curiosities

STEPHEN [*with a wave of the hand*] Anyhow, the construction of Jim's new road marks a new era in the life of the *Times* and *Mirror* [*Leaving the fireplace*] I'm putting no less than twelve thousand pounds into the dear old paper, Tad

THADDEUS [*standing by the table on the left*] Twelve thousand—!

STEPHEN How will that agree with Mr Hammond's digestion, eh? Twelve thousand pounds! [*Coming to THADDEUS*] And what are your plans for the future, if one may ask? You'll leave these wretched villas, of course?

THADDEUS [*evasively*] Oh, I—I'm waiting till this law business is absolutely settled

STEPHEN [*hastily*] Quite right, quite

right So am I, so am I, actually But we may talk, I suppose, among ourselves—

JAMES [*looking at his watch and rising*] By George! We shall miss Rose and the Colonel

STEPHEN [*fetching his hat*] Pish! the Colonel

JAMES [*shaking hands hurriedly with HELEN, who rises*] Ta-ta, my dear [*As he passes PHYLLIS*] See you at the meeting, Phyllis

STEPHEN [*to HELEN across the piano*] Good-bye, Helen

JAMES [*who has picked up his hat, at the door*] Don't be late, Tad

STEPHEN [*at the door*] No, no, don't be late

THADDEUS Four o'clock

STEPHEN Sharp

[THADDEUS follows JAMES and STEPHEN into the hall and returns immediately]

THADDEUS [*closing the door*] My dear Helen, I apologize to you most humbly

HELEN For what?

THADDEUS For Jim's bad taste, and Stephen's, in talking before you as they've been doing

HELEN Oh, it's of no consequence

THADDEUS I could have kicked Jim

HELEN [*impulsively*] Mr Tad—[*grasping him her hand*]—I congratulate you [*Going to PHYLLIS and kissing her lightly upon the cheek*] I congratulate you both heartily No two people in the world deserve good fortune more than you do

THADDEUS It's extremely kind and gracious of you to take it in this way

HELEN Why, in what other way could I take it?

THADDEUS At your age, you mayn't esteem money very highly But—there are other considerations—

HELEN [*turning away and seating herself upon the settee by the piano*] Yes, we won't speak of those

THADDEUS [*walking to the bay-window*] And there was just a chance that the inquiries might have brought a will to light—a will benefiting you Though you were anxious not to appear unfriendly to the family, you must have realized that

HELEN Whether I did or not, it's all done with now finally—finally [*Blowing the subject from her*] Phew!

THADDEUS [*his elbows on the piano, speaking across it to HELEN*] Phyl and I are not altogether selfish and grasping She has been worrying herself to death these last few days—haven't you, Phyl?—ever

since we heard the meeting was near a hand

PHYLLIS [*in a low voice*] Yes

THADDEUS Ever since you came to us, in fact

HELEN [*jumping up*] Ah, what a nuisance I've been to you! [*Sitting beside PHYLLIS*] How relieved you'll be to pack me off to-morrow!

THADDEUS To-morrow?

[*Uttering a little sound, PHYLLIS stops working and stares straight before her*]

HELEN [*slipping an arm round PHYLLIS'S waist*] That letter I had while we were at lunch—it was from a girl who used to sit next to me at Julian's She's found me some capital rooms, she says, close to Regent's Park, and I'm going up to look at them [THADDEUS comes to her] In any event, the sooner I get out of Singlehampton the better

THADDEUS Why?

HELEN Everybody in the town eyes me so queerly, I'm certain they suspect

THADDEUS It's your imagination

HELEN It isn't [*Hesitatingly*] I—I've confided in Mr Trist

THADDEUS [*surprised*] Confided in Trist?

HELEN [*nodding*] I hated the idea of his thinking me—deceitful

THADDEUS [*sitting on the settee by the piano*] Trist would never have guessed

HELEN Oh, Mr Tad, who, in heaven's name, that wasn't born yesterday could believe the story of my being simply a protégé of Father's, the daughter of an old business friend of his? Your brother Stephen may be an excellent editor, but his powers of invention are beneath contempt

THADDEUS [*laughing*] Ha, ha, ha! [*Rubbing his knees*] That's one for Stephen, that's a rap for Stephen

HELEN And then, again, the other members of the family are becoming so horribly jealous

THADDEUS [*seriously*] Ah, yes

HELEN You noticed your brother's remarks? And Mrs James and Mrs Stephen almost cut me in East Street this morning

THADDEUS [*clenching his fists*] Thank God, we shall have done with that sort of thing directly we shake the dust of Singlehampton from our feet!

HELEN Directly you—!

THADDEUS [*gaily*] There! Now I've let the cat out of the bag Phyllis will tell you You tell her, Phyl [*Rising*] I promised Rawlinson I'd help him index his madrigals this afternoon. I'll run round to

him and explain [*Pausing on his way to the door*] Helen, you must be our first visitor in our new home, wherever we pitch our tent Make that a bargain with her, Phyl [*At the door, to PHYLLIS*] We'll start at ten minutes to, old lady Be ready [*He disappears, closing the door after him*]

HELEN [*rising and walking away to the left*] Well! I do think it shabby of you, Phyllis You and Mr Tad might have trusted me with your secret [*Facing her*] Phyllis, wouldn't it be glorious if you came to London to live—or near London? Wouldn't it?

PHYLLIS [*in a strange, quiet voice, her hands lying quite still upon her lap*] Helen—Helen dear

HELEN Yes?

PHYLLIS That morning, a month ago, in Linchpool—while we were all sitting in your poor father's library waiting for you

HELEN [*returning to her*] On the Friday morning—

PHYLLIS There was a discussion as to making you an allowance, and—[*her eyes avoiding HELEN'S*]—and everybody was most anxious—most anxious—that you should be placed upon a proper footing

HELEN Mr Elkin broached the subject when I arrived You were out of the room

PHYLLIS Yes And you declined

HELEN Certainly I gave them my reasons Why do you bring this up?

[PHYLLIS rises, laying her work upon the table behind her]

PHYLLIS [*drawing a deep breath*]

Helen—I want you to reconsider your decision

HELEN Reconsider it?

PHYLLIS I want you to reconsider your determination not to accept an allowance from the family

HELEN Impossible

PHYLLIS Oh, don't be so hasty Listen first This good fortune of ours—of Tad's and mine—that you've congratulated us upon—I shall never enjoy it—

HELEN [*incredulously*] Oh, Phyllis!

PHYLLIS I shall not It will never bring me a moment's happiness unless you consent to receive an allowance from the family—[HELEN seats herself in the chair on the extreme left with her back to PHYLLIS]—sufficient to give you a sense of independence—

HELEN I couldn't

PHYLLIS And to make your future perfectly safe

HELEN I couldn't

PHYLLIS [*entreatingly*] Do—do—

HELEN It's out of the question

PHYLLIS Please—for my sake—

HELEN [*turning to her*] I'm sorry to distress you, Phyllis, indeed I'm sorry But when you see me gaining some little position in London, through my work, you'll cease to feel miserable about me

PHYLLIS Never—never—

HELEN [*starting up and walking to the fireplace impetuously*] Oh, you don't understand me—my pride A pensioner of the Mortimore family! I! How can you suggest it? I refused their help before I was fully acquainted with these, to me, uncongenial relations of Father's—I don't include Mr Tad in that expression, of course, and now I am acquainted with them I would refuse it a thousand times If I were starving, I wouldn't put myself under the smallest obligation to the Mortimores

PHYLLIS [*unsteadily*] Obligation—to—the—Mortimores—obligation—! [*As if about to make some communication to HELEN, supporting herself by leaning upon the table on the right, her body bent forward—almost maudibly*] Helen—Helen—

HELEN What—?

[*There is a short silence, and then PHYLLIS drops back upon the settee by the piano*]

PHYLLIS [*rocking herself to and fro*] Oh—oh, dear—oh—!

HELEN [*coming to her and standing over her*] You're quite ill, Phyllis, your bad nights are taking it out of you dreadfully You ought to have the advice of a doctor

PHYLLIS [*weakly*] No—don't send for the doctor—

HELEN Go up to your room, then, and keep quiet till Mr Tad calls you [*Glancing at the clock*] You've a quarter of an hour—

PHYLLIS [*clutching HELEN'S skirt*] Helen—you're fond of me and Tad—you said yesterday how attached you'd grown to us—

HELEN [*soothingly*] I am—I am—very fond of you

PHYLLIS And the children?

HELEN Yes, yes

PHYLLIS My poor children!

HELEN Hush! Why poor children? Pull yourself together Go up to your room

PHYLLIS [*taking HELEN'S hand and caressing it*] Helen, if you won't accept an allowance from the entire family, accept it from Tad and me

HELEN No, no, no!

PHYLLIS Four—three hundred a year
HELEN No
PHYLLIS Two hundred
HELEN No

PHYLLIS We could spare it We shouldn't miss it, we should never miss it
HELEN Not a penny

PHYLLIS [*rising and gripping HELEN'S shoulders*] You shall—you shall accept it, Helen

HELEN Phyllis! [*Releasing herself and drawing back*] Phyllis, you're very odd today You've got this allowance idea on the brain Look here, don't let's mention the subject again, or I—I shall be offended

PHYLLIS [*dully, hanging her head*] All right Very well

HELEN Forgive me It happens to be just the one point I'm sensitive upon [*Listening, then going to the open window*] Here are the children Do go upstairs [*Calling into the garden*] Hallo! [*PHYLLIS leaves the room as CYRIL and JOYCE appear outside the window The boy is carrying a few freshly cut roses*] Now, then, children! Isn't it time we routed Mr Trist out of his study?

CYRIL [*entering and going towards the door*] I'll stir the old chap up [*Remembering the nosegay*] Oh— [*Presenting it to HELEN, who comes forward with JOYCE*] Allow me—

HELEN For me? How sweet of you! [*Placing the flowers against her belt and then at her breast*] Where shall I wear them—here or there?

CYRIL Anywhere you like [*Awkwardly*] We sha'n't see anything nicer at the flower-show, I'm certain

HELEN No, they're beautiful

CYRIL [*his eyes on the carpet*] I don't mean the flowers

HELEN [*inclining her head*] Thank you [*CYRIL again makes for the door*] Don't disturb Mother [*Moving away to the fireplace, where, at the mirror, over the mantelshelf, she fixes the roses in her belt*] She has to go to Claybrook Road with your father in a little while, and I want her to rest

CYRIL [*pausing*] She is seedy, isn't she? [*Puckering his brows*] Going to Uncle Jim's, are they?

HELEN Yes

CYRIL That's to do with our money, I expect

HELEN [*busy at the mirror*] With your money?

CYRIL Father's come into a heap of money, you know

JOYCE [*reproachfully*] Cyril!

CYRIL [*not heeding her*] So have Uncle Jim and Uncle Stephen and Aunt Rose

HELEN I'm delighted

[*JOYCE signs to CYRIL to desist*]
CYRIL [*to JOYCE*] Oh, what's the use of our keeping it dark any longer?

JOYCE We promised Mother—

CYRIL Ages ago But you heard what Father said to Uncle Stephen—it's all over the town Young Pither says there's something about it in the paper

HELEN The paper?

CYRIL The *Courier*—that fellow Hammond's paper Hammond was beastly sarcastic about it last week, Pither says [*Going to the door*] I don't read the *Courier* myself [*At the door, he beckons to JOYCE She joins him, and his voice drops to a deep whisper*] Besides—[*he glances significantly at HELEN, whose back is turned to them*]—it'll make it easier for us [*Nudging JOYCE*] Now's your chance, do it now [*Aloud*] Give me five minutes, you two I can't be seen at the flower-show in these togs

[*He withdraws Having assured herself that the door is closed, JOYCE advances to HELEN*]

JOYCE Helen

HELEN Hallo!

JOYCE [*gravely*] Have you a minute to spare?

HELEN [*coming to the round table*] Yes, dear

JOYCE Helen, it's quite true we've come into a great deal of money Uncle Edward, who lived at Linchpool—oh, you knew him, didn't you?—he was a friend of yours—

HELEN [*nodding*] He was a friend of mine

JOYCE Uncle Edward has left his fortune to the family—[*breaking off*]—you've been told already!

HELEN Well—yes

JOYCE We haven't received our share yet, but we *shall*, as soon as it's all divided up [*Timidly*] Helen [*HELEN seats herself upon the ottoman in an attitude of attention*] I needn't tell you this will very much improve Father and Mother's position

HELEN Naturally

JOYCE And mine and Cyril's, too I'm to finish abroad, I believe

HELEN Lucky brat

* JOYCE But it's Cyril I want to talk to you about—my brother Cyril

HELEN Cyril?

JOYCE Cyril is to be entered for one of the principal public schools

HELEN Is he?

JOYCE One of those schools which stamp a boy a gentleman for the rest of his life

HELEN He is a gentleman, as it is I've a high opinion of Cyril

JOYCE Oh, I am glad to hear you say so, because—because

HELEN Because what? [*JOYCE turns away in silence to the settee by the piano*] What are you driving at, Joysey?

JOYCE [*lounging on the settee, uneasily and inelegantly*] Of course, Cyril's only fourteen at present, there's no denying that

HELEN I suppose there isn't

JOYCE But in three years' time he'll be seventeen, and in another three he'll be twenty

HELEN [*puzzled*] Well?

JOYCE And at twenty you're a man, aren't you?

HELEN A young man

JOYCE [*seating herself, her elbows on her knees, examining her fingers*] And even then he'd be content to wait

HELEN To wait? What for?

JOYCE [*in a low voice*] Cyril wishes to marry you some day, Helen

HELEN [*after a pause, gently*] Does he?

JOYCE He consulted me about it soon after you came to us, and I advised him to be quite sure of himself before he spoke to you And he is, quite sure of himself

HELEN And he's asked you to speak for him?

JOYCE He prefers my doing it [*Looking, under her lashes, at HELEN*] Are you furious?

HELEN Not a scrap

JOYCE [*transferring herself from the settee to the floor at HELEN'S feet—embracing her*] Oh, that's lovely of you! I was afraid you might be

HELEN Furious?

JOYCE [*gazing at her admiringly*] At our aiming so high I was afraid you might consider that marrying Cyril would be marrying beneath you

HELEN [*tenderly*] The girl who marries Cyril will have to be a far grander person than I am, Joyce, to be marrying beneath her

JOYCE Oh, Cyril's all right in himself, and so is Father Father's very retiring, but he's as clever a musician as any in the midlands And mother is all right in herself [*Backing away from HELEN*] It's not Mother's fault, it's her misfortune—

HELEN Her misfortune—?

JOYCE [*butterfly*] Oh, I'll be bound they mentioned it at "Ivanhoe" or at the Crescent

HELEN Mentioned—?

JOYCE [*between her teeth*] The shop—grandfather's shop—

HELEN Ah, yes

JOYCE [*clenching her hands*] Ah! [*Squatting upon her heels, her shoulders hunched*] Grandfather was a grocer, Helen—a grocer Oh, mother has suffered terribly through it—agones

HELEN Poor mother!

JOYCE We've all suffered Sometimes it's been as much as Cyril and I could do to keep our heads up—[*proudly, with flashing eyes*!—but we've done it The Single-hampton people are beasts

HELEN Joyce!

JOYCE If it's the last word I ever utter—beasts [*Swallowing a tear*] And only half of it was grocery—only half

HELEN Only half—?

JOYCE It was a double shop There were two windows, the other half was bottles of wine They forget that, they forget that!

HELEN A shame

JOYCE [*embracing HELEN again*] What shall I say to him, then?

HELEN Say to him?

JOYCE Cyril—what answer shall I give him?

HELEN Oh, tell Cyril that I am highly complimented by his offer—

JOYCE [*eagerly*] Complimented—yes—?

HELEN And that, if he's of the same mind when he's a man, and I am still single, he may propose to me again

JOYCE [*in alarm*] If you're—still single—?

HELEN Yes—[*shaking her head*] and if he's of the same mind

[*There is a sharp, prolonged rapping on the door JOYCE and HELEN rise*]

JOYCE [*going to the door*] It's that frightful tease

[*She opens the door and TRIST enters, carrying his hat, gloves, and walking-stick*]

TRIST Ladies, I have reason to believe that several choice specimens of the *Dianthus Caryophyllus* refuse to raise their heads until you grace the flower-show with your presence

[*JOYCE slaps his hand playfully and disappears HELEN takes her hat from the round table and standing before*

the mirror at the mantelpiece, pins it on her head TRIST *watches her*
 HELEN *[after a silence, her back to TRIST]* The glass reflects more than one face, Mr Trist

TRIST *[moving]* I beg your pardon

HELEN You were thinking—?

TRIST Philosophizing—observing your way of putting on your hat

HELEN I put it on carelessly?

TRIST Quickly A convincing sign of youth After you are five-and-twenty the process will take at least ten minutes

HELEN And at thirty?

TRIST Half an hour Add another half-hour for each succeeding decade—

HELEN *[turning to him]* I'm afraid you are a knowing, worldly parson

TRIST *[laughing]* No, no, a tolerant, human parson

HELEN We shall see *[Picking up her gloves]* If ever you get a living in London, Mr Trist, I shall make a point of sitting under you

TRIST I bind you to that

HELEN *[pulling on a glove]* By-the-bye, I set out to seek my London living to-morrow

TRIST *[with a change of manner]* To-morrow?

HELEN To-morrow

TRIST *[blankly]* I—I'm sorry

HELEN Very polite of you I'm glad

TRIST Glad?

HELEN It sounds rather unkind, doesn't it? Oh, I'm extremely fond of everybody in this house—Mr and Mrs Tad and the children, I mean But I'm sure it isn't good, morally, for me to be here, even if there were no other reasons for my departure

TRIST Morally?

HELEN Yes, if I remained here, all that's bad in my nature would come out on top Do you know that I've the makings in me of a most accomplished liar and hypocrite?

TRIST I shouldn't have suspected it

HELEN I have *[Coming nearer to him]* What do you think takes place this afternoon?

TRIST What?

HELEN *[with gradually increasing excitement]* There's to be a meeting of the Mortimore family at James Mortimore's house at four o'clock He and his brother Stephen have just informed me, with the delicacy which is characteristic of them, that they are going to arrange with the lawyers to administer my father's estate without any more delay And I was dou-

ble-faced enough to receive the news smilingly and agreeably, and all the time I could have struck them—I could have seen them drop dead in this room without a pang of regret—

TRIST No, no—

HELEN I could *[Walking away and pacing the room on the left]* Oh, it isn't Father's money I covet I said so to the family in Lunchpool, and I say it again But I deceived myself

TRIST Deceived yourself?

HELEN Deceived myself I can't bear that Father should have forgotten me I can't bear it, I can't resign myself to it, I shall never resign myself to it I thought I should be able to, but I was mistaken I told Mr Thaddeus that I've been suffering no suspense this last month It's a fa'se-hood, I've been suffering intense suspense I've been watching the posts, for letters from Elkin, I've been praying, daily hourly, that something—anything—might be found to prove that Father had remembered me And I loathe these people who step over me and stand between me and the being I loved best on earth, I loathe them I detest the whole posse of them, except the Thaddeuses, and I wish this money may bring them, and those belonging to them, every ill that's conceivable *[Confronting TRIST, her bosom heaving]* Don't you lecture me

TRIST *[good-humoredly]* I haven't the faintest intention of doing so

HELEN Ha! *[At the piano, mimicking JAMES]* Here's Gordon Street—

TRIST Eh?

HELEN You come along here, to Albert Terrace—taking in Clark's piano factory—

TRIST Who does?

HELEN *[fiercely]* Here—here's the pub at the corner!

TRIST *[bewildered]* I—I don't—

HELEN *[speaking to him across the piano]* James Mortimore is buying land and building a new street in the town

TRIST Really?

HELEN And Stephen is putting twelve thousand pounds into his old-fashioned paper, to freshen it up, and the Pontings are moving into a big house in London—near Burkeley Square, as James calls it, and they must needs discuss their affairs in my hearing, brutes that they are! *[Coming to the chair on the left of the table at the end of the piano]* Oh, thank God, I'm leaving the town to-morrow! It was only a sort of curiosity that brought me here *[Sitting and producing her handker-*

chief] Thank God, I'm leaving to-morrow!

[TRIST walks to the window on the right to allow her to recover herself, and then returns to her]

TRIST My dear child, may I speak quite plainly to you?

HELEN [wiping her eyes] If you don't lecture me

TRIST I won't lecture you I merely venture to suggest that you are a trifle illogical

HELEN I dare say

TRIST After all, recollect, our friends James and Stephen are not to be blamed for the position they find themselves in

HELEN Their manners are insufferable

TRIST Hardly insufferable Nothing is insufferable

HELEN There you go!

TRIST Their faults of manner and breeding are precisely the faults a reasonable, dispassionate person would have no difficulty in excusing And I shall be much astonished, when the bitterness of your mortification has worn off—

HELEN You are lecturing!

TRIST I'm not, I give you my word I'm not

HELEN It sounds uncommonly like it What did I tell you the other day—that you were different from the clergymen I'd met hitherto, because you were—?

TRIST Jolly

HELEN [with a shrug] Jolly! [Wearily] Oh, please go and hurry the children up, and let's be off to the flowers

TRIST [not stirring] My dear Miss Thornhill—

HELEN [impatiently] I'll fetch them—

TRIST Don't [Deliberately] My dear Miss Thornhill, to show you how little I regard myself as worthy of the privilege of lecturing you, [smiling] to show you how the seeds of selfishness may germinate and flourish even in the breast of a cleric—may I make a confession to you?

HELEN Confession—?

TRIST I—I want to confess to you that the circumstance of your having been left as you are—cast adrift on the world, unprotected, without means apart from your own talent and exertions—is one that fills me with—hope

HELEN Hope?

TRIST Fills me with hope, though it may scarcely justify my presumption [Sitting opposite to her] You were assuming a minute ago, in joke perhaps, the possibility of my obtaining a living some day

HELEN [graciously, but with growing uneasiness] Not altogether in joke

TRIST Anyhow, there is a decided possibility of a living coming my way—and practically in London, as it chances

HELEN I—I'm pleased

TRIST Yes, in the natural order of events a living will be vacant within the next few years which is in the gift of the father of an old college chum of mine It's a suburban parish—close to Twickenham—and I'm promised it

HELEN That would be—nice for you

TRIST [gazing at her fixedly] Jolly

HELEN [her eyes drooping] Veiy—jolly

TRIST I should still be a poor man—that I shall always be, but poverty is relative It would be riches compared to my curacy here [After a pause] The vicarage has a garden with some grand old trees

HELEN Many of the old gardens—in the suburbs—are charming

TRIST I—I could let the vicarage during the summer to increase my income

HELEN May a vicar—let—his vicarage?

TRIST It's done Some bishops object to it, [innocently] but you can dodge the old boy

HELEN Dodge the—old boy!

TRIST There are all sorts of legal fictions to help you I know of a bishop's son-in-law who let his vicarage for a term under the pretence of letting only the furniture

HELEN Wicked

TRIST [leaning forward] But I shouldn't dream of letting my vicarage if my income—proved sufficient—

HELEN It would be wealth—you say—in comparison—

TRIST Yes, but I—I might—marry

HELEN [hastily] Oh—oh, of course

[The door opens and JOYCE and CYRIL enter dressed for going out CYRIL is in his best suit, is gloved, and swings a cane which is too long for him At the same moment THADDEUS lets himself into the garden at the gate He is accompanied by DENYER, an ordinary-looking person with whiskers and mustache HELEN and TRIST rise, and she goes to the mirror in some confusion and gives a last touch to her hat]

JOYCE Have we kept you waiting?

CYRIL Sorry Couldn't get my tie to go right

THADDEUS [in the garden] Come in

Denyer [*At the window, to those in the room*] What, haven't you folks gone yet?

TRIST [*with the children, following HELEN into the garden*] Just off

THADDEUS [*to HELEN, as she passes him*] Hope you'll enjoy yourself

TRIST [*to DENYER*] Ah, Mr Denyer, how are you?

DENYER How are you, Mr Trist?

JOYCE and CYRIL [*to THADDEUS*]

Good-bye, Father

THADDEUS [*kissing them*] Good-bye, my dears

[*TRIST opens the gate, and HELEN and the children pass out into the lane*]

TRIST follows them, closing the gate

THADDEUS and DENYER enter the room

DENYER is carrying a newspaper

CYRIL [*out of sight, shrilly*] Which way?

TRIST [*out of sight*] Through Parker Street

JOYCE [*out of sight*] Who walks with who?

HELEN [*out of sight*] I walk with Cyril

[*The sound of the chatter dies in the distance*]

DENYER [*to THADDEUS*] Then I can put up the bill at once, Mr Mortimore?

THADDEUS [*laying his hat upon the table on the left*] Do, Denyer To-morrow—to-day—

DENYER I'll send a man round in the morning [*Producing a note-book and writing in it*] Let's see—your lease is seven, fourteen, twenty-one?

THADDEUS That's it

DENYER How much of the first seven is there to run—I ought to remember?

THADDEUS Two years and a half from Michaelmas

DENYER Rent?

THADDEUS Forty

[*The door opens a little way and PHYLLIS peeps in* Her features are drawn, her lips white and set]

DENYER Fixtures at a valuation, I s'pose?

THADDEUS Ha, ha! The costly fixtures at a valuation

DENYER You may as well sell 'em, if they only fetch tuppence [*He sees PHYLLIS, who has entered softly*] Good afternoon, ma'am

PHYLLIS [*in a low voice*] Good afternoon

THADDEUS [*turning to her*] Phyl,

dear! I met Mr Denyer in the lane [*Glee-fully*] The bill goes up to-morrow—"house to let"—to-morrow morning—[*to DENYER*] first thing—

[*PHYLLIS moves to the bay-window without speaking*]

DENYER First thing [*Putting his pocketbook away*] Excuse me—you're on the lookout for a new residence?

THADDEUS Oh—er—one must live somewhere, Denyer

DENYER And a much superior house to this, Mr Mortimore, I lay a guinea

THADDEUS [*walking about with his hands in his pockets*] The children are springing up—getting to be tremendous people

DENYER [*genially*] Oh, come, sir! We know

THADDEUS [*pausing in his walk*] Eh?

DENYER Everybody in the town knows of your luck, and the family's [*Picking up his hat and newspaper, which he has laid upon the ottoman*] Here's another allusion to it in this week's *Courier*

THADDEUS The *Courier*?

DENYER [*handing him the paper*] Just out You keep it, I've got another at home [*THADDEUS is searching the paper*] Middle page—"Town Topics"

THADDEUS Thanks

DENYER Mr Hammond—he will poke his fun [*Going to the window*] P'raps you'll give us a call, sir?

THADDEUS [*following him absently, reading*] Yes, I'll call in

[*DENYER turns to PHYLLIS, who is sitting in the chair by the bay-window*]

DENYER Good-day, ma'am [*In the garden, to THADDEUS, persuasively*] Now you won't forget Gibson and Denyer, Mr Mortimore?

THADDEUS [*at the window*] I won't, I won't

DENYER The old firm [*Opening the gate*] What we haven't got on our books isn't worth considering, you take it from me

[*He disappears, closing the gate* THADDEUS comes back into the room]

THADDEUS Upon my soul, this is too bad of Hammond This'll annoy Jim and Stephen frightfully—drive 'em mad [*Flinging the paper on to the settee by the piano*] Oh, well

[*Putting his necktie in order at the mirror*] By Jove, we've done it at last, old lady! "House to let," hey? I believe I'm keener about it than you are, now it's come to it What a sensation it'll cause at "Ivanhoe," and at the

Crescent! I tell you what, you and I must have a solemn talk to-night—a parliament—when the children have gone to bed, a regular, serious talk [Turning] You know, I'm still for Cheltenham Cheltenham seems to me to offer so many advantages [PHYLLIS rises slowly] There's the town itself—bright and healthy, then the College, for Cyril As for its musical tastes— [Breaking off and looking at the clock] I say, do get your things on, Phyl [Compiling his watch with the clock and then turning and winding it] We shall catch it if we're not punctual

PHYLLIS I—I'm not going, Tad

THADDEUS Not going, dear?

PHYLLIS No—I— [He advances to the right of the piano solicitously] I can't go

THADDEUS Aren't you up to it?

[She moves to the open window and looks into the garden]

PHYLLIS They won't—be back—for a long while?

THADDEUS The children, and Trist and Helen? Not for an hour or two

PHYLLIS [turning] Tad—that girl—that girl—

THADDEUS Helen?

PHYLLIS [coming forward a little] We're robbing her, we're robbing her [Shaking] We're all robbing her

THADDEUS [at her side] You've got another bad attack of nerves this afternoon—an extra bad one—

PHYLLIS [suddenly, grasping his coat] Tad—I—I've broken down—

THADDEUS Broken down?

PHYLLIS I've broken down under it I—I can't endure it

THADDEUS [soothingly] What—what—?

PHYLLIS Your brother—Edward—your brother—Edward—

THADDEUS Yes?

PHYLLIS Everything—everything—belongs to her—Helen—

THADDEUS My dear, the family were prepared to offer Helen—

PHYLLIS No, no! He left every penny to her—left it to her [Staring into his face] There was a will

THADDEUS A will?

PHYLLIS I saw it

THADDEUS You saw it?

PHYLLIS I read it—I had it in my hand—

THADDEUS [incredulously] You did!

PHYLLIS Yes, I—I did away with it—

THADDEUS Did away with it?

PHYLLIS Destroyed it

THADDEUS A will—Ned's will—! [She turns from him and sinks helplessly on to the settee by the fireplace He stands looking down upon her in a half-frightened, half-puzzled way, then his face clears and he looks at the clock again Calmly] Phyl, I wish you'd let me have Chapman in

PHYLLIS [in a faint voice] No—no—

THADDEUS My dear, we can afford a doctor now, if we require one That bromide stuff he prescribed for you once—that did you no end of good [Going towards the door] I'll send Kate

PHYLLIS [raising herself] Tad—

THADDEUS [reassuringly] I'll stay with you till he comes

PHYLLIS Tad—[getting to her feet]—you—you think I'm not right in my head Tad, I—I know what I'm saying I'm telling the truth I'm telling you the truth

THADDEUS A will—?

PHYLLIS [at the round table] Yes—yes—

THADDEUS No, no, you're talking nonsense [He goes to the door and there pauses, his hand on the door-knob] When—when—?

PHYLLIS When—?

THADDEUS When did you see it?

PHYLLIS On the—on the Wednesday night

THADDEUS The Wednesday night?

PHYLLIS You remember—the night there was no night-nurse?

THADDEUS I remember, of course

PHYLLIS Ann and Louisa had gone to the hotel to lie down, and—I was alone with him

THADDEUS I remember it all perfectly

PHYLLIS [moving towards the ottoman, supporting herself by the table] I was with him from eight o'clock till nearly eleven

THADDEUS Till the others came back That was the night he—the night he sank

PHYLLIS Yes, it was just before then that he—that he—

THADDEUS [leaving the door] Just before then—?

PHYLLIS It was just before the change set in that he—that he sent me down stairs

THADDEUS Downstairs?

PHYLLIS To the library

THADDEUS The library?

PHYLLIS With the keys

THADDEUS Keys?

PHYLLIS His bunch of keys

THADDEUS Sent you downstairs—to the library—with his keys?

PHYLLIS Yes

THADDEUS What for?

PHYLLIS To fetch something

THADDEUS Fetch something?

PHYLLIS From the safe

THADDEUS The safe?

PHYLLIS The safe in the library—[*sitting on the ottoman*].—the safe in the bookcase in the library

THADDEUS [*coming to her*] What—what did he send you to fetch, dear?

PHYLLIS Some—some jewelry

THADDEUS Jewelry?

PHYLLIS Some pieces of jewelry He had some pieces of jewelry in his safe in the library, that he'd picked up, he said, at odd times, and he wanted to make me a present of one of them

THADDEUS Make you a present ?

PHYLLIS As a keepsake [*Her elbows on her knees, digging her fingers into her hair*] It was about half-past nine I was sitting beside his bed, thinking he was asleep, and I found him looking at me He recollected seeing me when I was a child, he said, skating on the ponds at Claybrook, and he said he was sure I—I was a good wife to you—and a good mother to my children And then he spoke of the jewelry—and opened the drawer of the table by the bed—and took out his keys—and explained to me how to open the safe

THADDEUS [*his manner gradually changing as he listens to her recital*] You—you went down ?

PHYLLIS Yes

THADDEUS And—and ?

PHYLLIS And unlocked the safe And in the lower drawer I—I came across it

THADDEUS Came across ?

PHYLLIS He told me I should find four small boxes—and I could find only three—and that made me look into the drawer—and—and under a lot of other papers—I—I saw it

THADDEUS It?

PHYLLIS A big envelope, with "My Will" written upon it

[*There is a short silence, then THADDEUS seats himself upon the settee by the piano*]

THADDEUS [*in a whisper*] Well?

PHYLLIS [*raising her head*] I put it back into the drawer, and locked the safe, and went upstairs with the jewelry Outside the bedroom door I found Heath I'd given him permission to run out for an hour, to get some air, with Pearce and

Sadler, the housemaids He asked me if they could do anything for me before they started I told him No, and that Mr Mortimore seemed brighter and stronger I heard him going down the servant's staircase, and then I went into the room—up to the bed—and—he was altered

THADDEUS [*moistening his lips with his tongue*] Ned ?

PHYLLIS His cheeks were more shrunken, and his jaw had dropped slightly, and his lips were quite blue, and his breathing was short and quick I measured the medicine which he was to have if there was any sign of collapse, and lifted him up and gave it to him Then I rang the bell, and by and by the woman from the kitchen answered it He was easier then—dozing, but I told her to put on her hat and jacket and go for Dr Oswald And then I stood watching him, and—and the idea—came to me

THADDEUS The—the idea?

PHYLLIS My head suddenly became very clear Every word of the argument in the train came back to me—

THADDEUS Argument?

PHYLLIS Between James and the others—in the train, going to Lynchpool, on the Tuesday—

THADDEUS Oh—oh, yes

PHYLLIS If Edward died, how much would he die worth? Who would come in for all his money? Would he remember the family, to the extent of a mourning ring or so, in his will? If he should die leaving no will! Of course Ned would leave a will, but—where did a man's money go to when he *didn't* leave a will?

THADDEUS [*under his breath*] To his—next-of-kin !

PHYLLIS [*rising painfully*] After a time, I—I went downstairs again At first I persuaded myself that I only wanted to replace the jewelry—that I didn't want to have to explain about the jewelry to Ann and Lou, [*moving about the room on the left*] but when I got downstairs, I *knew* what I was going to do And I did it as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world I put back the little boxes—and took out the big envelope—and locked up the safe again, and—read the will [*Pausing at the piano*] Everything—everything—to some person—some woman living in Paris [*Leaning upon the piano, a clenched hand against her brow*] "Everything I die possessed of to Helen Thornhill, now or late of—" such-and-such address, "spinster, absolutely", and she was to be his executrix—"sole executrix" That was all, except

that he begged her to reward his old servants—his old servants at his house and at the brewery Just a few lines—on one side of a sheet of paper—

THADDEUS Written—in his own—hand?

PHYLLIS I think so

THADDEUS You—you've seen his writing—since—

PHYLLIS [*leaving the piano*] Yes—I'm sure—in his own hand

THADDEUS [*heavily*] That clears it up, then

PHYLLIS Yes

THADDEUS He'd made his will—himself—himself—

PHYLLIS [*her strength failing a little*] Three years ago I—noticed the date—[*dropping into the chair on the extreme left*]—it was three years ago—

[*Again there is a silence, then he rises and walks about aimlessly*]

THADDEUS [*trying to collect his thoughts*] Yes—yes, this clears it up This clears it all up There was a will There was a will He didn't forget his child, he didn't forget her What fools—what fools we were to suppose he *could* have forgotten his daughter!

PHYLLIS [*writhing in her chair*] Oh, I didn't know—I didn't guess—! His daughter! [*Moaning*] Oh! oh!

THADDEUS Don't, don't, old lady [*She continues her moaning*] Oh, don't, don't! Let's think, let's think, now, let's think [*He seats himself opposite to her*] Now, let's think Helen—this'll put Helen in a different position entirely, a different position entirely—won't it? I—I wonder—I wonder what's the proper course for the family to take [*Stretching out a trembling hand to her*] You'll have to write down—to write down carefully—very carefully—[*breaking off, with a change of tone*] Phyl—

PHYLLIS Oh! oh!

THADDEUS Don't, dear, don't! Phyllis, perhaps you—didn't—destroy the will, not—actually—destroy it? [*Imploringly*] You didn't destroy it, dear!

PHYLLIS I did—I did—

THADDEUS [*leaning back in his chair, dazed*] I—I'm afraid—it—t's rather—a serious matter—to—to destroy—

PHYLLIS [*starting up*] I did destroy it, I did destroy it [*Pacing the room on the right*] I kept it—I'd have burnt it then and there if there'd been a fire—but I kept it—I grew terrified at what I'd done—oh, I kept it till you left me at Roper's on the Thursday morning, and then I—I went on

to the Ford Street bridge—and tore it into pieces—and threw them into the water [*Wringing her hands*] Oh! oh!

THADDEUS [*his chin on his breast*] Well—well—we've got to go through with it We've got—to go—through— [*Rising and walking about unsteadily on the left*] Yes, yes, yes, what a difference it'll make to everybody—not only to Helen! What a difference it'll make at "Ivanhoe," and at the Crescent—and to Rose—!

PHYLLIS They'll curse me! They'll curse me more than ever!

THADDEUS And to—to us!

PHYLLIS To us—the children—!

THADDEUS [*shaking a finger at her across the piano, cunningly*] Ah-ah-ah, but when the affair's really settled, we'll still carry out our intention We—we'll still—

PHYLLIS [*facing him*] Our intention? Our—?

THADDEUS Our intention—of leaving the town—

PHYLLIS [*wildly*] Leaving the town! Oh, my God, we shall *have* to leave the town!

THADDEUS [*recoiling*] Oh—!

PHYLLIS Leave it as beggars and outcasts!

THADDEUS [*quietly*] Oh, yes, we shall—have—to leave the town—now—

[*The door opens and a little maid-servant enters THADDEUS looks at her with dull eyes*]

THE SERVANT Please, sir—

THADDEUS Eh?

THE SERVANT Maud's just come down from "Ivanhoe" They're waiting for you

THADDEUS W—waiting?

THE SERVANT That's the message, sir Mr James and the family's waiting for Mr Thaddeus

THADDEUS Oh, I— [*Taking out his watch and fingering it*] Yes, of course—[*to the servant*]—I—I'm coming up [*THE SERVANT withdraws THADDEUS picks up his hat from the table on the left and turns to PHYLLIS*] Good-bye, dear [*Taking her in his arms, and kissing her, simply*] I—I'll go up

[*He puts his hat on, finds his way to the door with uncertain steps, and disappears*]

ACT III

The dining-room in JAMES MORTIMORE'S house in Singlehampton In the rear wall there is an arched recess

with a fireplace at the back of it, and on either side of the fireplace, within the recess, there is a chimney-seat. On the right of the recess a door opens into the room from a hall or passage. Standing out in the middle of the room is a large, oblong dining-table, uncovered. On the table are a couple of ink-stands, some pens, paper, and blotting-paper. Ten chairs are placed at regular intervals at the table—three at each side and two at the ends. Against the wall on the right, near the door, stands a heavy sideboard. On it are several pieces of ugly-looking, showy plate, a carafe of water and a tumbler, and, upon a tray, a decanter of red wine and some wine-glasses. Against the same wall there is a cabinet. In front of the cabinet there is a round table, covered with a white cloth, on which teacups and saucers are laid for ten persons. Also on the table are a tea-caddy and teapot, a plated kettle-stand, a plum-cake, and other accompaniments of afternoon tea. On each side of the tea-table there is an arm-chair belonging to the same set of chairs that surround the dining-table. Against the left-hand wall is another heavy piece of furniture. Except for this, and the sideboard and the cabinet, the walls, below the dado rail, are bare. The architecture, decorations, and furniture are pseudo-artistic and vulgar. The whole suggests the home of a common person of moderate means who has built himself a "fine house."

JAMES and STEPHEN are seated at the further side of the dining-table with a newspaper spread out before them. Standing by them, reading the paper over their husbands' shoulders, are ANN and LOUISA. ROSE is sitting, looking bored, at the right-hand end of the table, and PONTING, smoking a cigar, is pacing the room on the left. LOUISA and ROSE, the latter dressed in rich half-mourning, are wearing their hats.

JAMES [scowling at the paper] It's infamous.

LOUISA Abominable!

ANN It oughtn't to be allowed, James.

STEPHEN Ah, now James is stabbed at as well as myself.

JAMES The man's a blackguard, that's what he is.

LOUISA His wife's a most unpleasant woman.

STEPHEN [leaning back and wiping his spectacles] Hitherto I have been the chief object of Mr Hammond's malice.

LOUISA You'll soon have your revenge now, Stephen. [To the others] Stephen will soon have his revenge now.

JAMES By George, I've half a mind to ask Vallance to give me his opinion on this!

STEPHEN We might consult Vallance, certainly.

LOUISA And tell him what Mrs Hammond was.

ANN When she was plain Nelly Robson.
STEPHEN Sssh! Do, pray, keep the wife out of it.

PONTING [looking at his watch as he walks across to the right] I say, my friends, it's four o'clock, you know. [The MORTIMORES stiffen themselves and regard him coldly.] Where are these lawyer chaps?

JAMES [folding the newspaper] They're not in my pocket, Colonel.

STEPHEN No, we're not in the habit of carrying them about with us.

LOUISA [laughing silyly] Oh, Stephen! ROSE We mustn't lose the—what's the train back, Toby?

PONTING [behind her chair, annoyed] Five fifty-seven.

ROSE I shall be dead with fatigue, I've two parties to-night.

JAMES Parties?

ROSE [to PONTING] Destinn is singing at the Trench's, Toby.

STEPHEN [rising] H'm! Indeed?

ANN [in an undertone, withdrawing with LOUISA to the fireplace] Singing!

JAMES [rising] So you're going to parties, are you, Rose? Pretty sharp work, with Ned only a month in his grave.

PONTING We're not conventional people.

ROSE [rising and walking away to the left] No, we don't mourn openly.

PONTING We don't carry our hearts on our what-d'ye-call-it—sleeve.

ROSE And Edward wasn't in the least known in London society.

JAMES [walking about on the right] You knew him.

PONTING In London, my friends, regular mournin' is confined to the suburbs nowadays. May I have an ash-tray?

ROSE And we go to Harrogate on the twenty-ninth.

PONTING. Good Lord, yes, I'm kept devilish quiet there.

[ANN takes a metal ash-tray from the mantelpiece and gives it to STEPHEN,

who almost flings it on to the table
The door opens and a maid-servant enters followed by ELKIN and VALLANCE. The lawyers carry small leather bags. The servant retires.]

JAMES [shaking hands heartily with ELKIN and VALLANCE] Here you are!

ELKIN A minute or two behind time—my fault

STEPHEN How d'y'e do, Mr Elkin? [Shaking hands with VALLANCE] Good afternoon

ELKIN [to PONTING] How d'y'e do?

PONTING [shortly, not rising] H'ah you?

VALLANCE [shaking hands with ANN and LOUISA and bowing to ROSE] How do you do?

ELKIN [to ROSE] Hope you're very well, Mrs Ponting

ROSE Thanks

VALLANCE [to PONTING, who nods in return] Good afternoon

PONTING [bringing the palm of his hand down on the table] Now, then!

JAMES [to ELKIN and VALLANCE, inviting them by a gesture to be seated] Excuse the dining-room, gentlemen, looks more like business than the drawing-room

STEPHEN [on the left] Where's Tad?

ANN Yes, where's Tad?

LOUISA [sitting beside her] Where are Tad and Phyllis?

JAMES [looking at his watch] Five past, by my watch

ROSE [sitting at the left-hand end of the table] Oh, never mind them

JAMES [to STEPHEN] P'r'aps you told 'em four-thirty?

STEPHEN [nettled] Perhaps I told them!

JAMES All right, all right, don't flare up! P'r'aps I did, there was a talk of making it half-past

STEPHEN [raising his arms] On the day I go to press—

JAMES Ring the bell [Opening the door and calling] Maud! Maud—!

[STEPHEN rings the bell ELKIN and VALLANCE are now seated, ELKIN in the farther chair at the right-hand end of the dining-table, VALLANCE in the chair between ELKIN and ANN. They open their bags and sort and arrange their papers.]

PONTING We shall be here till midnight

JAMES Maud—!

ROSE [pushing her chair away from the table] How vexing!

PONTING [with a sneer] I suppose

one can buy a soot of pyjamas in the town, eh, Miss James?

ELKIN I sha'n't detain you long

[The servant appears at the door]

JAMES Maud, run down to Nelson Villas—just as you are—

ROSE [satirically] Don't hurry them, Jim Phyllis is smartening herself up

STEPHEN [seating himself in the farther chair at the left-hand end of the dining-table, loudly] Say we are waiting for Mr Thaddeus

JAMES [to the girl] Mr James and the family are waiting for Mr Thaddeus [As he closes the door] Go along Collier Street, you may meet him

PONTING [fussily] We can deal with preliminaries, at any rate. Kindly push that ash-tray a little nearer [To VALLANCE] Mr Vallance—

JAMES [leaving the door, resenting PONTING'S assumption of authority] I beg your pardon, Colonel, we'll give my brother another five minutes' grace, with your permission

PONTING [shrugging his shoulders] By all means—ten—twenty—

JAMES [finding that he has the newspaper in his hand] Oh—here—! [Opening the paper] While we're waiting for Tad—

STEPHEN Ah, yes Read it aloud, Jim

PONTING [rising and moving away impatiently] Tsch!

JAMES Mr Vallance, Mr Elkin—oblige us by listening to this. It's from the *Courier*

STEPHEN This week's *Courier*—published to-day—

VALLANCE [to ELKIN] One of our local papers

JAMES Owned by a feller o' the name of Hammond [Reading] "Town Topics"

ANN He married a Miss Robson

LOUISA A dreadful woman

STEPHEN Sssh, sssh! Mr Hammond's offensive remarks are usually directed against myself, but in this instance—

JAMES [walking about as he reads] "A curious complication arises in connection with the estate of the late Mr Edward Mortimore of Linchpool"

STEPHEN He doesn't cloak his attack, you see

JAMES "As many of our readers are aware—[running his hands over his pockets]—as many of our readers are aware—"

STEPHEN He has made them aware of it

JAMES [to ANN] Where did I put them, Mother?

ANN [producing her spectacles] Try mine, James

[ANN gives her spectacles to STEPHEN, STEPHEN gives them to ROSE, and ROSE presents them to JAMES]

JAMES I'm getting as blear-eyed as Stephen [Resuming] "As many of our readers are aware, the whole of that gentleman's wealth passes, in consequence of his having died intestate, to a well-known Singlehampton family——"

LOUISA That points to us

STEPHEN [irritably] Of course it does, of course it does

LOUISA There's no better-known family in Singlehampton than ours

STEPHEN Sssh, sssh!

JAMES "—two members of which——"

ANN The Mockfords were an older family—but where are the Mockfords?

JAMES [to ANN] Give me a chance Ann [Continuing] "—two members of which have been for many years prominently associated with the temperance movement in this town"

STEPHEN [rising] My brother James and myself

JAMES [standing at the table, facing ELKIN and VALLANCE, in his oratorical manner] Twelve years ago, gentlemen, I was instrumental in founding the Singlehampton and Claybrook Temperance League——

LOUISA Stephen was another of the founders

STEPHEN [joining JAMES] I was another

JAMES And day in and day out I have devoted my best energies to furthering the objects of the League in Singlehampton and in Claybrook

STEPHEN Very materially aided by the *Times and Mirror*, a temperance organ

JAMES And I submit that it's holding us up to ridicule and contempt—holding us up to public obloquy and derisions——

VALLANCE [to JAMES] What is your objection to the paragraph, Mr Mortimore?

JAMES Objection!

ELKIN There's more to come, I expect

JAMES [grimly] Aye, a bit more [Sitting at the table] What d'ye think of this? [Reading] "When it is remembered that the late Mr Mortimore's fortune was derived from the brewing and the sale of beer——"

STEPHEN [sitting beside JAMES] The word "beer" is in italics

VALLANCE Oh, I see

JAMES "—it will be understood that our two distinguished fellow-townsmen are placed in an extremely difficult position"

STEPHEN This is the most spiteful part of it

JAMES "We have no doubt, however, that, as conscientious men, they will prove fully equal to the occasion by either renouncing their share of their late brother's property or by dedicating it entirely to the advancement of the cause they have at heart" [Throwing the newspaper to ELKIN and VALLANCE] There it is, gentlemen

[In wandering round the room, PONTING has come upon the decanter of wine and the wine-glasses standing on the sideboard He is now filling a glass]

PONTING Every man has a right to his convictions [Taking the glass in his hand] A little alcohol hurts nobody——

JAMES You won't find any in my house

PONTING What's this, then?

JAMES Currant

PONTING [replacing the glass, with a wry face] My dear Mortimore!

[He sits at the right-hand end of the table, beside ELKIN, and pries at the documents which ELKIN has taken from his bag VALLANCE and ELKIN are reading the paragraph together, VALLANCE drawing his chair closer to ELKIN'S for that purpose]

JAMES [to VALLANCE] Well, what's your opinion, Mr Vallance? Is that libellous, or isn't it?

STEPHEN Docs it, or does it not, go beyond the bounds of fair comment—eh, Mr Elkin?

VALLANCE [pacifically] Oh, but aren't you attaching a great deal too much importance to this?

JAMES Too much——!

ELKIN Why not ignore it?

STEPHEN Ignore it!

VALLANCE Treat it as a piece of pure chaff—badinage——

ELKIN In more or less bad taste

VALLANCE Take no notice of it whatever

JAMES [rising and walking away to the fireplace] Take no notice of it! The townspeople will take notice of it pretty quickly

STEPHEN [rising] In my opinion, that paragraph renders our position in the League absolutely untenable

JAMES [standing over VALLANCE]

Unless that paragraph is apologized for, withdrawn —

STEPHEN [*standing over ELKIN*] Explained away —

JAMES Aye, explained away —

VALLANCE I don't see how it can be explained away

ELKIN [*dryly*] The proposition is a perfectly accurate one, whatever you may think of the corollary

VALLANCE You are ardent advocates of temperance

ELKINS Your late brother's property was amassed mainly by beer

VALLANCE It can hardly be explained away

STEPHEN [*walking to the left*] Good heavens above, I've explained things away often enough in my paper!

JAMES [*coming forward on the right*] This does us at the League, then—does us, knocks our influence into a cocked hat

ELKIN [*to JAMES and STEPHEN, while VALLANCE folds the paper*] After all, gentlemen, when you come to reflect upon it, the laugh is with you

JAMES Is it?

ELKIN [*genially*] The *Courier* has its little joke, but you've got the money, remember

JAMES Oh, that's true

STEPHEN [*walking about on the left, rattling his loose cash*] Aye, we've got the mopuses

ROSE [*tilting her chair on its hind legs*] I say, Jim—Stephen—why don't you two boys, between you, present the League with a handsome hall —?

JAMES [*pausing in his walk*] Hall?

ROSE Build the temperance folk a meeting-place of their own—a headquarters —

PONTING [*mischievously*] He, he, he! That 'ud smoothe 'em down Capital idea, Rosie!

JAMES and STEPHEN We!

JAMES I'd see 'em damned first [*To the ladies*] I beg pardon —

ANN [*with unusual animation*] No, no, you're quite right, James

STEPHEN [*at the fireplace*] That would be playing into Mr Hammond's hands with a vengeance

JAMES [*walking across to the left, deliberately*] Ha! Wouldn't Hammond crow, hev! Ha, ha, ha!

STEPHEN No, if the situation becomes, too acute—painful as it would be to me—I shall resign

JAMES [*determinedly*] Resign

STEPHEN Sever my connection with the League

JAMES Leave 'em to swill themselves with their lemonade and boiled tea —!

STEPHEN [*coming forward on the right*] And to find out how they get or without us

JAMES Serve 'em up in their own juice!

STEPHEN [*meeting JAMES in the middle of the room on the nearer side of the dining-table*] You know, Jim, we've never gone quite so far—you and I—with the principles of temperance as some

JAMES [*eyeing him curiously*] Never gone so far —?

STEPHEN As old Bob Amphlett, for example—never

JAMES Oh, yes, we have, and a deuced sight farther

STEPHEN Excuse me—I've always been for moderation rather than for total abstinence

JAMES Have yer? [*Walking away to the left*] First I've heard of it

STEPHEN Anyhow, a man may broaden his views with years and experience [*Argumentatively*] Take the hygienic aspect of the case Only the other day, Sir Vincent West, probably the ablest physician in England —

LOUISA [*abruptly*] Stephen!

STEPHEN [*angrily*] Don't interrupt me

LOUISA [*with energy, rising*] I've maintained it throughout my life—it's nothing new from my lips —

STEPHEN What —

LOUISA There are two sides to every question

STEPHEN [*hurrying round the table to join LOUISA*] Exactly—exactly—as Lou says —

LOUISA It's been almost a second religion with me I've preached it in season and out of season —

STEPHEN [*with conviction*] There are two sides —

LOUISA Two sides to every question

JAMES [*to ANN, pointing to the door*] Mother

[*The door has been opened by another maid-servant, who carries a tray on which are a plated kettle, a dish of toast, and a plentiful supply of bread-and-butter The girl remains in the doorway ANN rises and goes to her and takes the kettle from the tray JAMES comes forward and seats himself on the nearer side of the dining-table in the middle chair*] Look here, I don't wait another minute for the Tads—not a second

PONTING Ah!

[*LOUISA follows ANN and takes the toast and the bread-and-butter from the servant, who then disappears, closing the door*]

STEPHEN [*again sitting in the farther chair at the left-hand end of the dining-table*] Inexcusable of them—inexcusable

[*ANN and LOUISA come to the tea-table and, drawing the two armchairs up to it, seat themselves and prepare the tea. The kettle is set upon the stand, the spirit-lamp is lighted, ANN measures the tea from the caddy into the pot, and LOUISA cuts the plum-cake*]

JAMES Mr Elkin—Mr Vallance—

PONTING Now, Mr Vallance, now, Mr Elkin!

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE*] Will you?

VALLANCE No, no—you

ELKIN Well, gentlemen—[*to ROSE*]—Mr Ponting—Mr Vallance and I have to report to you that we've received no communication of any kind in answer to our circulars and advertisements—

[*ANN is making a clatter with the kettle*]

JAMES [*to ANN*] Steady, Mother

PONTING [*to the ladies at the tea-table*] Sssh, sssh, sssh!

ELKIN No communication from any solicitor who has prepared a will for your late brother, nor from anybody who has knowingly witnessed a will executed by him

STEPHEN Mr Vallance has apprised us of this already

JAMES [*raising a hand*] Order! There's a formal way of doing things and a lax way

STEPHEN I merely mentioned—

[*PONTING raps the table sharply with his knuckles*]

ELKIN I may say that, in addition to the issuing of the circulars and advertisements, I have made search in every place I could think of, and have inquired of every person likely to be of help in the matter. In fact, I've taken every possible step to find, or trace, a will

VALLANCE Without success

ELKIN Without success

JAMES [*magnanimously*] And I say that the family bears no grudge to Mr Elkin for doing his duty

STEPHEN [*in the same spirit*] Hear, hear!

PONTING [*testily*] Of course not, of course not

ROSE It's all the more satisfactory, it seems to me, that he has worried round

JAMES The family thanks Mr Elkin

STEPHEN We thank Mr Elkin

ELKIN [*after a stiff inclination of the head*] The only other observation I wish to make is that several gentlemen employed in the office of the brewery in Linchpool have at different times witnessed the late Mr Mortimore's signature to documents which have apparently required the attestation of two witnesses

PONTING [*courtly*] That amounts to nothing

JAMES There are a good many documents, aren't there, where two witnesses are required to a signature?

ELKIN Deeds under seal, certainly

STEPHEN I remember having to sign, some years ago—

[*PONTING again raps the table*]

VALLANCE But none of these gentlemen at the brewery can recall that any particular document appeared to him to be a will, which is not a document under seal

JAMES Besides, a man signing a will always tells the witnesses that it is his will they're witnessing, doesn't he, Mr Vallance?

VALLANCE A solicitor would, in the ordinary course of practice, inform the witnesses to a will of the nature of the document they were attesting, undoubtedly

ELKIN Granted, but a testator, supposing he were executing his will in his own house or office, and not in the presence of a solicitor, is under no legal necessity to do so, and may omit to do so

JAMES [*rolling about in his chair*] Oh, well, we needn't—

PONTING [*looking at his watch*] In heaven's name—!

STEPHEN We needn't go into all this

ELKIN No, no, I simply draw attention to the point [*Unfolding a document*] Well, gentlemen—Mrs Ponting—this is a statement—[*handing another document to VALLANCE*]—here is a copy of it, Mr Vallance—this is a statement of particulars of stocks, shares, and other items of estate, with their values at the death of the late Mr Mortimore, and a schedule of the debts so far as they are known to me

[*There is a general movement. JAMES rises and goes to VALLANCE*]

STEPHEN also rises, stretching out an

eager hand towards VALLANCE

ROSE draws nearer to the table,

PONTING still closer to ELKIN

ANN and LOUISA, too, show a disposition to desert the tea-table.]

JAMES [*to ANN, as he passes her*] You get on with the tea, Mother [*To VALLANCE*] Allow me, Mr Vallance—

[*VALLANCE gives him the duplicate of the statement*]

PONTING What's it come out at, what's it come out at?

STEPHEN What's it come out at?

ROSE Yes, what does it come out at? Jim—

STEPHEN Jim—

[*JAMES joins STEPHEN and they examine the duplicate together* ROSE rises and endeavors to read it with them]

ELKIN I estimate the gross value of the estate, which, as you will see, consists entirely of personal property, as one hundred and ninety-two thousand pounds

PONTING The gross value

STEPHEN Yes, but what do we get?

PONTING and ROSE What do we get?

JAMES After all deductions

ELKIN Roughly speaking, after payment of debts, death duties, there will be about a hundred and seventy thousand pounds to divide [*Those who are standing sit again* JAMES seats himself next to STEPHEN and, with pen and ink, they make calculations on paper PONTING does the same ROSE, closing her eyes, fans herself happily, and the two ladies at the tea-table resume their preparations with beaming countenances ELKIN leans back in his chair] Mr Vallance—

VALLANCE [*to ROSE, JAMES, and STEPHEN*] Mrs Ponting and gentlemen—[*PONTING raps the table and JAMES and STEPHEN look up*]—I advise you that, as next-of-kin of the late Mr Mortimore, if you are satisfied—and in my opinion you may reasonably be satisfied—that he died intestate—I advise you that any one or more of you, not exceeding three [*the door opens quietly and THADDEUS appears* He is very pale, but is outwardly calm After a look in the direction of the table, he closes the door]—may apply for Letters of Administration of your late brother's estate It isn't necessary or usual, however, I may tell you, to have more than one administrator, and I suggest—

[*Hearing the click of the lock as THADDEUS shuts the door, everybody turns and glances at him*]

ROSE [*opening her eyes*] Here's Tad

STEPHEN [*grumpily*] Oh—

ROSE [*tossing THADDEUS a greeting*]

Hallo!

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, with a growl*] Oh, you've arrived

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*] Did I say four or half-past—?

LOUISA Where's Phyllis?

ANN Where's Phyllis?

THADDEUS [*in a low voice, advancing*] She—she didn't feel well enough—

[*PONTING raps the inkstand with his penholder*]

JAMES [*pointing to the chair beside him, imperatively*] Sit down, sit down [*THADDEUS sits, his elbows on the table, his eyes cast down*] Mr Vallance

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS*] Good afternoon, Mr Mortimore

ELKIN [*nodding to THADDEUS*] How d'ye do?

THADDEUS [*almost maudibly*] Good afternoon

VALLANCE [*to the others*] I suppose we needn't go back ?

A MURMUR No, no, no, no

JAMES [*pushing the duplicate of the statement under THADDEUS'S eyes*] A hundred and seventy thousand pounds to divide

STEPHEN A hundred and seventy thousand

PONTING [*finishing his sum*] Forty-two thousand five hundred apiece

VALLANCE [*resuming*] I was saying that it isn't usual to have more than one administrator, and I was about to suggest that the best course will be for you, Mr James, to act in that capacity, and for you, Mr Stephen, and you, Mr Thaddeus, or one of you, and Colonel Ponting, to be the sureties to the bond for the due administration of the estate

JAMES [*cheerfully*] I'm in your hands, Mr Vallance

STEPHEN I'm agreeable

PONTING And I

VALLANCE The procedure is this—perhaps I'd better explain it [*Producing a form of "Oath for Administrators" which is among his papers*] The intended administrator will make an affidavit stating when and where the deceased died, that he died intestate [*THADDEUS looks up*]—a bachelor without a parent, and that the deponent is a natural and lawful brother and one of the next-of-kin of the deceased—

THADDEUS [*touching VALLANCE'S arm*] Mr Vallance

VALLANCE Eh?

THADDEUS We—we mustn't go on with this

VALLANCE I beg pardon?

THADDEUS The family mustn't go on with this

VALLANCE Mustn't go on——?

JAMES [*to THADDEUS*] What a'yer talking about?

THADDEUS [*after a hurried look round*] There—there was a will

VALLANCE A will?

THADDEUS He—he made a will

JAMES Who did?

THADDEUS Edward He—he left a will

JAMES [*roughly*] What the——!

ELKIN [*to JAMES, interrupting him*]

One moment Your brother has something to say to us, Mr Mortimore

STEPHEN What—what's he mean by——?

ELKIN [*to STEPHEN*] Please! [*To THADDEUS*] Yes, sir? [*THADDEUS is silent*] What about a will? [*THADDEUS is still silent*] Eh?

THADDEUS I—I saw it

ELKIN Saw a will?

THADDEUS I—I opened it—I—I read it——

ELKIN Read it?

THADDEUS I—tore it up—got rid of it

[*Again there is silence, the MORTIMORES and the PONTINGS sitting open-mouthed and motionless*]

ELKIN [*after a while*] Mr Vallance, I think we ought to tell Mr Mortimore that he appears to be making a confession of the gravest kind——

VALLANCE Yes

ELKIN One that puts him in a very serious position

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS, after a further pause*] Mr Mortimore ?

[*THADDEUS makes no response*]

ELKIN If, understanding that, he chooses to continue, there is nothing to prevent our hearing him

THADDEUS [*looking straight before him, his arms still upon the table, locking and unlocking his hands as he speaks*] It—it happened on the Wednesday night—in Cannon Row—in Ned's house—the night before he died—the night we were left without a nurse [*Another pause*] VALLANCE takes a sheet of paper and selects a pen ELKIN pushes the inkstand nearer to him] Mrs James—and—and Mrs Stephen—my—my sisters-in-law——

[*ANN and LOUISA get to their feet and advance a step or two*]

ELKIN [*hearing the rustle of their skirts and turning to them*] Keep your seats, ladies, please

[*They sit again, drawing their chairs close together*]

THADDEUS My sisters-in-law had gone home—that is, to their hotel—to get a few hours' sleep in case of their having to sit up through the night Jim and Stephen and I were out and about, trying to find a night-nurse who'd take Nurse Ralston's place temporarily At about nine o'clock, I looked in at Cannon Row, to see how things were getting on

VALLANCE [*who is writing*] The Wednesday? Mr Edward Mortimore dying on Thursday, the twentieth of June——

ELKIN On the morning of Thursday, the twentieth

VALLANCE That makes the Wednesday we are speaking of, Wednesday, June the nineteenth

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] You looked in at Cannon Row——?

VALLANCE At about nine o'clock on the night of Wednesday, June the nineteenth

THADDEUS I—I went upstairs and sat by Ned's bed, and by and by he began talking to me about—about Phyllis He—he'd taken rather a fancy to her, he said, and he wanted to give her a memento—a keepsake

ELKIN Phyllis——?

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*] His wife [*To THADDEUS*] Your wife?

[*THADDEUS nods*]

ELKIN [*recollecting*] Of course

THADDEUS [*moistening his lips with his tongue*] He—he had some little bits of jewelry in his safe, and he—he asked me to go downstairs and—and to bring them up to him

ELKIN [*keenly*] In his safe?

VALLANCE The safe in the library?

[*THADDEUS nods again*]

ELKIN Quite so

VALLANCE And—er——?

THADDEUS He—he gave me his keys, and I—I went down—I——

[*He stops suddenly and VALLANCE glances at him Noticing his extreme pallor, VALLANCE looks round the room Seeing the water-bottle upon the sideboard, VALLANCE rises and fills the tumbler Returning to the table he places the glass before THADDEUS and resumes his seat*]

THADDEUS [*after a gulp of water*] It was—it was in the drawer of the safe—the drawer——

ELKIN What was?

THADDEUS [*wiping his mouth with his*

handkerchief] A large envelope—a large envelope—the envelope containing the will

VALLANCE How did you know—?

THADDEUS "My Will" was written on it

VALLANCE [*writing*] "My Will"

ELKIN On the envelope? [THADDEUS *nods*] You say you opened it?

[THADDEUS *nods*]

VALLANCE Opened the envelope—

ELKIN And inside—you found—

VALLANCE What did you find?

THADDEUS Ned's will

VALLANCE [*writing*] What appeared to be your brother Edward's will

ELKIN You read it? [THADDEUS *nods*] Will you tell us—?

[THE MORTIMORES and the PONTINGS crane their necks forward, listening breathlessly]

THADDEUS He left everything—[taking another gulp of water]—everything—to Miss Thornhill

[There is a slight, undecided movement on the part of the MORTIMORES and the PONTINGS]

ELKIN [*calmly but firmly*] Keep your seats, keep your seats, please [TO THADDEUS] Can you recall the general form of the will?

THADDEUS [*straining his memory*] Everything he had—died possessed of—to Helen Thornhill—spinster—of some address in Paris—absolutely And—and he appointed her his sole executrix

ELKIN Do you recollect the date?

THADDEUS Date—?

ELKIN Did you observe the date of the will?

THADDEUS [*quickly*] Oh, yes, it was made three years ago

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE*] When she came of age

THADDEUS Oh, and he asked her to remember his servants—old servants at the brewery and in Cannon Row [*Leaning back, exhausted*] There was nothing else It was very short—written by Ned—

ELKIN The whole of it? [THADDEUS *nods, with half-closed eyes*] The whole of it was in his handwriting? [THADDEUS *nods again*] Ah! [*To VALLANCE, with a note of triumph in his voice*] A holograph will, Mr Vallance, prepared by the man himself

VALLANCE [*now taking up the questioning of THADDEUS*] Tell me, Mr Mortimore, have you any exact recollection as to whether this document, which you describe as a will, was duly signed and witnessed?

THADDEUS [*rousing himself*] It was—it was—signed by Ned

VALLANCE Was it signed, not only by your brother, but by two witnesses under an attestation clause stating that the testator signed in the joint presence of those witnesses and that each of them signed in his presence?

THADDEUS I—I don't recollect that

VALLANCE [*writing*] You've no recollection of that

[JAMES, STEPHEN, and PONTING stir themselves]

JAMES [*hoarsely*] He doesn't recollect that, Mr Vallance

STEPHEN [*in quavering tones*] No, he—he doesn't recollect that

PONTING [*pulling at his mustache with trembling fingers*] That's most important, Mr Vallance, isn't it—isn't it?

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS, not heeding the interruption*] You say you destroyed this document—

ELKIN Tore it up

VALLANCE When—and where? In the room—in the library?

THADDEUS [*thinking*] N-no—out of doors

VALLANCE Out of doors When?

THADDEUS [*at a loss*] When ?

VALLANCE When? [*Looking at him in surprise*] You can't remember?

THADDEUS [*recollecting*] Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes Some time between ten and eleven on the Thursday morning, after I left Phyllis—after I left my wife at Roper's to be measured for her black

VALLANCE [*writing*] What did you do then?

THADDEUS [*readily*] I went to Ford Street bridge, and tore up the paper, and dropped the pieces into the Linch

VALLANCE [*writing*] Into the river

ELKIN One more question, Mr Mortimore—to make your motive perfectly clear to us May we assume that, on the night of June the nineteenth, you were sufficiently acquainted with the law of intestacy to know that, if this dying man left no will, you would be likely to benefit considerably?

THADDEUS Well, I—I had—the idea

ELKIN The idea?

THADDEUS I—I—[*recollecting*] Oh, yes, there'd been a discussion in the train, you see, on the Tuesday, going to Linchpool—

ELKIN Discussion?

THADDEUS Among us all, as to how a

man's money is disposed of, if he dies intestate

ELKIN [*nodding*] Precisely [*To JAMES and STEPHEN*] You remember that conversation taking place, gentlemen?

JAMES Oh, I—I dessay

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] So that, when you came upon the envelope with the endorsement upon it—"My Will"?

THADDEUS [*leaning his head upon his hands*] Yes—yes

VALLANCE [*running his eyes over his notes, to THADDEUS*] Have you anything to add, Mr Mortimore?

THADDEUS [*in a muffled voice*] No [*Quickly*] Oh, there is one thing I should like to add [*Brokenly*] With regard to Miss Thornhill—I—I hope you'll bear in mind that I—that none of us—heard from Mr Elkin of the existence of a child—a daughter—till the Thursday—middle-day

ELKIN That is so

THADDEUS It doesn't make it much better, only—a girl—alone in the world—one wouldn't—[*breaking off*—no, I've nothing more to say

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] And we may take it that your present act, Mr Mortimore, is an act of conscience, purely?

[*THADDEUS inclines his head. There is silence again, the MORTIMORES and the PONTINGS presenting a picture of utter wretchedness. The ladies' tears begin to flow*]

JAMES [*after a time, speaking with some difficulty*] Well—

STEPHEN [*piteously*] Mr Vallance?

JAMES What—what's to be done, Mr Vallance?

PONTING [*to the ladies*] For God's sake, be quiet!

JAMES [*with a clenched fist on the table*] What we want to know is—what we want to know is—who does my brother Edward's money belong to now—her or us?

STEPHEN [*in agony*] Her!

PONTING Don't be a damn fool, Mortimore!

VALLANCE Well, gentlemen, I confess I am hardly prepared to express an opinion off-hand on the legal aspect of the case—

PONTING The will's torn up—it's destroyed—!

STEPHEN It's destroyed—gone—gone!

PONTING Gone

VALLANCE But I need not remind you there is another aspect—

PONTING I don't care a rap for any other aspect—

STEPHEN We want the law explained to us—the law—

PONTING The law—!

JAMES [*to ELKIN*] Mr Elkin—?

ELKIN You appeal to me, gentlemen!

STEPHEN and PONTING Yes—yes—

ELKIN Then I feel bound to tell you that I shall advise Miss Thornhill, as the executrix named in the will, to apply to the Court for probate of its substance and effect—

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*] Ask the Court to presume the will to have been made in due form—?

ELKIN Decidedly

[*STEPHEN and PONTING fall back in their seats in a stupor, and once more there is silence, broken only by the sound of the women sniveling. ELKIN and VALLANCE slowly proceed to collect their papers*]

JAMES [*turning upon THADDEUS, brutally*] Have you—have you told Phyllis—have you told your wife what you've been up to?

[*At the mention of PHYLLIS there is a movement of indignation on the part of the ladies*]

ROSE Ha!

JAMES [*to THADDEUS*] Have yer?

THADDEUS Y—yes—just before I came out [*Weakly*] That—that's what made me so late

JAMES [*between his teeth*] What does she think of yer?

THADDEUS Oh, she—she's dreadfully—cut up—of course

ROSE [*hysterically*] The jewelry! Ha, ha, ha! [*Rising*] She's managed to get hold of some of the jewelry, at any rate

ANN [*with a sob*] Yes, she—she managed that

LOUISA [*mopping her face*] She's kept that from us artfully enough

ROSE [*going over to ANN and LOUISA, who rise to receive her*] Ha, ha! Edward's little bits of jewelry!

ANN Little bits!

ROSE They're little bits that are left

LOUISA How many did she have of them, I wonder!

ROSE She shall be made to restore them—

* LOUISA Every one of them

THADDEUS No, no, no—[*Stretching out a hand towards the ladies*] Rose—Ann—Lou—Phyllis hadn't any of the jew—

dry—not a scrap I put it all back into the safe I—I swear she hadn't any of it

ELKIN Why did you do that?

THADDEUS [*agitatedly*] Why, you see, Mr Elkin, when I carried it upstairs, I found my brother Edward in a state of collapse—a sort of faint—

ELKIN [*with a nod*] Ah—

THADDEUS And Phyllis—my wife—she sent me off at once for the doctor It was on the Wednesday evening, you know—

VALLANCE [*pricking up his ears*] Your wife, Mr Mortimore—?

THADDEUS It was on a Wednesday evening that the change set in

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS*] Your wife sent you off at once—?

THADDEUS To fetch the doctor

VALLANCE [*raising his eyebrows*] Oh, Mrs Mortimore was in the house while this was going on?

THADDEUS Y—yes, she was left in charge of him—in charge of Ned—

ELKIN [*to VALLANCE, in explanation*] To allow these other ladies to rest, preparatory to their taking charge later

THADDEUS Yes

VALLANCE I hadn't gathered—

JAMES [*who had been sitting glaring into space thoughtfully*] Hold hard [*To THADDEUS*] You didn't go for the doctor

THADDEUS Yes, I—I went—

STEPHEN [*awakening from his trance*] Phyllis sent the cook for the doctor

THADDEUS Yes, yes, you're quite right The cook was the first to go—

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] You followed?

THADDEUS I followed

JAMES [*knitting his brows*] It must have been a good time afterwards

THADDEUS Y—yes, perhaps it was

JAMES I was at Dr Oswald's when the woman arrived The doctor was out, and—

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS*] You said your wife sent you at once

THADDEUS Told me to go at once There—there was the jewelry to put back into the safe

VALLANCE [*eying THADDEUS*] What time was it when you got to the doctor's?

THADDEUS Oh—ten, I should say—or a quarter-past

JAMES [*shaking his head*] No I sat, there, waiting for Dr Oswald to come in—

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*] Besides,

that couldn't have been, you were with me then

JAMES [*to STEPHEN*] Was he?

STEPHEN Why, yes, he and I were at the Nurses' Home in Wharton Street from half-past nine till ten

JAMES Half-past nine—?

STEPHEN [*becoming more confident as he proceeds*] And we never left each other till we went back to Cannon Row

VALLANCE Let us understand this—

PONTING [*having gradually revived, eagerly*] Yes—yes—[*to the ladies*]—sssh!

STEPHEN And, what's more, we allowed ourselves a quarter of an hour to walk to Wharton Street

JAMES [*quietly, looking round*] Hallo!

THADDEUS It—it's evident that I—that I'm mistaken in thinking that I—that I went to Dr Oswald's—

VALLANCE Mistaken?

THADDEUS I—I suppose that, as the woman had already gone, I—I considered it—wasn't necessary [*To ELKIN and VALLANCE, passing his hand before his eyes*] You must excuse my stupidity, gentlemen

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS, distrustfully*] Then, according to your brother Stephen, Mr Mortimore, you were in Cannon Row, on the occasion of this particular visit, no longer than from nine o'clock till a quarter past?

STEPHEN Not so long, because we met, by arrangement, at a quarter-past nine, in the hall of the Grand Hotel—

JAMES The hotel's six or seven minutes' walk from Cannon Row—

PONTING Quite, quite

THADDEUS [*a little wildly*] I said I called in at Cannon Row at about nine o'clock It may have been half-past eight, it may have been eight—

JAMES Ann and Lou didn't leave Cannon Row till past eight—

LOUISA [*standing, with ANN and ROSE, by the tea-table*] It had gone eight—

JAMES I walked 'em round to the Grand—

STEPHEN The three of us walked with them to the Grand—!

LOUISA All three—

JAMES So we did

STEPHEN [*excitedly*] And then Thaddeus went off to the Clarence Hospital with a note from Dr Oswald—

JAMES By George, yes!

STEPHEN I left him opposite the Ex-

change—it must have been nearly half-past eight *then*!

[*JAMES rises. The ladies draw nearer to the dining-table*]

THADDEUS Ah, but I didn't go to the hospital—I didn't go to the hospital—

STEPHEN [*rising*] Yes, you did. You brought a note *back* from the hospital, for us to take to Wharton Street—

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*] How far is the Clarence Hospital from the Exchange?

ELKIN A ten-minutes' drive. It's on the other side of the water.

THADDEUS I—I—I'd forgotten the hospital—

JAMES [*scowling at THADDEUS*] Forgotten—?

THADDEUS I—I—I mean I—I thought the hospital came later—after I'd been at Wharton Street.

JAMES [*going to VALLANCE and tapping him on the shoulder*] Mr Vallance—

THADDEUS I—I must have gone to Cannon Row *between* my return from the hospital and my meeting Stephen at the Grand—

JAMES [*to ELKIN and VALLANCE*] Why, he couldn't have *done* it, gentlemen—

PONTING Impossible!

STEPHEN It's obvious, he *couldn't* have done it.

THADDEUS I—I was only a few minutes at the hospital—

ELKIN [*scribbling on the back of a document*] Oh, yes, he could have done it—barely—

VALLANCE [*making a mental calculation*] Assuming that he left his brother at the Exchange at eight-twenty—

ELKIN Ten minutes to the hospital.

VALLANCE If he drove there—

THADDEUS I did drive—I did drive—

PONTING [*also figuring it out on paper*] Ten minutes back—

ELKIN Ten minutes at the hospital—

PONTING Eight-fifty—

THADDEUS Eight-fifty in Cannon Row! That was it—that was it, Mr Elkin—

JAMES Give him twenty minutes in Cannon Row—*give* it him! He couldn't have done all he says he did in the time, gentlemen—

STEPHEN He couldn't have *done* it—

PONTING Impossible!

ELKIN [*to PONTING*] No, no, please—not impossible.

VALLANCE [*to STEPHEN*] When you met Mr Thaddeus Mortimore—you—when you met him in the hall of the Grand Hotel, before starting for Wharton Street, did he say anything to you as to his having just called at the house—?

STEPHEN No.

VALLANCE Nothing as to an alarming change in your brother's condition?

STEPHEN Not a syllable.

JAMES [*to ELKIN and VALLANCE*] Oh, there's a screw loose here, gentlemen, surely?

STEPHEN [*joining JAMES*] That is most extraordinary, Mr Vallance—isn't it? Not a syllable!

[*ANN and LOUISA join their husbands and the four gather round ELKIN and VALLANCE. ROSE stands behind PONTING'S chair*]

THADDEUS You see—Edward—Edward had rallied before I left Cannon Row. He—he'd fallen into a nice, quiet sleep—

JAMES All in twenty minutes, gentlemen—twenty minutes at the outside!

VALLANCE [*to THADDEUS*] Mr Mortimore—

ANN I remember—

PONTING [*to ANN*] Hold your tongue!

VALLANCE Mr Mortimore, *who let you into the house* in Cannon Row on the night of June the nineteenth?

PONTING Ah, yes—

VALLANCE At any time between the hours of eight o'clock?

STEPHEN And eleven.

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] Who gave you admittance—which of the servants?

THADDEUS I—I can't—I don't [*blankly, addressing VALLANCE*] was it the—butler?

VALLANCE No, no, I ask you [*To ELKIN, who nods in reply*] Have you the servants' addresses?

THADDEUS But you wouldn't—you wouldn't trust to the servants' memories as to—as to which of them opened the front door to me a month ago! [*With an attempt at a laugh*] It's ridiculous!

ELKIN [*reprovingly*] Ah, now, now, Mr Mortimore!

THADDEUS [*starting up from the table*] Oh, it isn't fair—it isn't fair of you to badger me like this, it isn't fair!

VALLANCE Nobody desires to "badger" you—

THADDEUS Trip me up, then—confuse me [*At the left-hand end of the table, clutching the back of a chair*] The will—the will's the main point—Ned's will

What does it matter—what can it matter, to a quarter of an hour or so—when I was in Cannon Row, or how long I was there? One would think, by the way I'm being treated, gentlemen, that I'd something to gain by this, instead of everything to lose—everything to lose!

JAMES [*coming forward, on the farther side of the table*] Don't you whine about what you've got to lose—!

STEPHEN [*joining him*] What about us!

THE LADIES Us!

PONTING [*hitting the table*] Yes, confound you!

VALLANCE Colonel Ponting!

ELKIN [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*] It seems to me—if my friend Mr Vallance will allow me to say so—that you are really bearing a little hardly on your brother Thaddeus

THADDEUS [*gratefully*] Thank you, Mr Elkin

ELKIN What reason—what possible reason can there be for doubting his good faith?

THADDEUS Thank you

ELKIN Here is a man who forfeits a considerable sum of money, and deliberately places himself in peril, in order to right a wrong which nobody on earth would have suspected him of committing Mr Mortimore is *accusing* himself of a serious offense, not defending himself from it

VALLANCE [*obstinately*] What we beg of Mr Mortimore to do, for the sake of all parties, is to clear up certain inconsistencies in his story with his brothers' account of his movements and conduct on this Wednesday evening We are entitled to ask that

JAMES Aye—entitled

STEPHEN and PONTING Entitled

ELKIN [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*] Yes, and Mr Mortimore is equally entitled to refuse it

JAMES, STEPHEN, and PONTING [*indignantly*] Oh—!

THADDEUS But I—I haven't refused I—I've done my best—

ELKIN On the other hand, if he has no objection to her doing so, the person to assist you, I suggest—distressing as it may be to her—is the wife

VALLANCE [*assentingly*] The wife

[*THADDEUS pushes aside the chair which he is holding and comes to the table*]

ELKIN She ought to be able to satisfy you as to what time he was with her—

VALLANCE [*to everybody*] By-the-bye, has she ever mentioned this visit of her husband's to Cannon Row—?

ANN and LOUISA Never—never—

ELKIN Attaching no importance to it But now—

THADDEUS [*stretching out a quivering hand to them all*] No No, no Don't you—don't you drag my wife into this I—I won't have my wife dragged into this—

JAMES [*in a blaze*] Why not?

STEPHEN Why not?

THE LADIES [*indignantly*] Ah—!

THADDEUS You—you leave my wife out of it—

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, furiously*] Who the hell's your wife—!

ELKIN and VALLANCE Gentlemen—gentlemen—

LOUISA Who's Phyllis—!

ANN Who's she—!

ROSE Ha!

JAMES and STEPHEN [*derisively*] Ha, ha, ha!

THADDEUS Anyhow, I do object—I do object to your dragging her into it— [*his show of courage flickering away*]— I—I do object—[*coming to the nearer side of the table, rather unsteadily*] Mr Elkin—Mr Vallance—I—I don't think I can be of any further assistance to you to-day

[*VALLANCE shrugs his shoulders at ELKIN*]

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS, kindly*] One minute—one minute more Mr Vallance has taken down your statement roughly [*To VALLANCE*] If you'll read us your notes, Mr Vallance, Mr Mortimore will tell us whether they are substantially correct—[*To THADDEUS*] Perhaps he will even be willing to attach his name to them

[*With a nod of patient acquiescence, THADDEUS sinks into the middle chair VALLANCE prepares to read his notes, first making some additions to them*]

JAMES [*to THADDEUS, from the other side of the table*] Look here—!

THADDEUS [*feebly*] No—no more questions I—I'm advised I—I may refuse—

JAMES Mr Vallance asked you just now about your conscience—

THADDEUS I—I'm not going to answer any more questions—

STEPHEN [*to JAMES*] It was Mr Elkin—

JAMES I don't care a curse which it was—

THADDEUS No more questions—

JAMES [*leaning across the table towards THADDEUS, fiercely*] When the devil did your conscience begin to prick you over this? Hey?

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*] Yes, you've been in excellent spirits apparently this last month—excellent spirits

JAMES [*hammering on the table*] Hey?

STEPHEN [*to ELKIN and VALLANCE*] There was no sign of anything amiss when we were with him this afternoon, gentlemen—none whatever, I give you my word

JAMES Less than two hours ago—not a symptom!

STEPHEN [*to JAMES*] He was gay enough at the club dinner on Tuesday night. It was remarked—commented on

LOUISA [*at STEPHEN'S elbow, unconsciously*] It's Phyllis who's been ill all the month, not Thaddeus

JAMES [*in the same way, with a hoarse laugh*] Ha! If it had been his precious wife who'd come to us and told us this tale—

STEPHEN Yes, if it had been the lady—

JAMES If it had been—[*Struck by the idea which occurs to him, JAMES breaks off THADDEUS doesn't stir JAMES, after a pause, continues thoughtfully*] If it had been

STEPHEN [*holding his breath, to JAMES*] Eh?

JAMES [*slowly stroking his beard*] One might have—understood it

[*ELKIN has been listening attentively*]

ELKIN [*in a tone of polite interest*] How long has Mrs Mortimore been indisposed?

JAMES [*disturbed*] Oh—er—a few weeks—

VALLANCE [*quietly*] Ever since—?

JAMES [*with a nod*] Aye [ELKIN and VALLANCE look at each other inquiringly]

STEPHEN [*staring into space*] Ever since—Edward—as a matter of fact—

ROSE [*going to ANN and LOUISA*] What's wrong with her? What's wrong with his wife?

ANN [*obtusely*] She's not sleeping

LOUISA [*looking from one to the other*] No—she isn't—

[*There is a further pause, and then THADDEUS, slowly turning from the table, rises*]

THADDEUS [*in a strange voice, his hands fumbling at the buttons of his jacket*] Well, gentlemen—whatever my

sins are—I—I decline to sit still and hear my wife insulted in this style. If it's all the same to you, I'll call round on Mr Vallance in the morning and—and sign the paper—

[*While THADDEUS is speaking, JAMES and STEPHEN come forward on the left, ELKIN and VALLANCE on the right. The three women get together at the back and look on with wide-open eyes. The movement is made gradually and noiselessly, so that when THADDEUS turns to go he is startled at finding his way obstructed. After a time PONTING also leaves the table, watching the proceedings, with a falling jaw, from a little distance on the right*]

ELKIN [*rubbing his chin meditatively, to THADDEUS*] Mr Mortimore, your wife traveled with you and the other members of the family to Linchpool on the Tuesday—?

JAMES Aye, she was with us—

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] She was in the railway carriage when the—when the discussion arose—?

STEPHEN Yes, yes—

ELKIN The discussion as to where a man's money goes, in the absence of a will?

ANN [*from the other side of the table*] Yes—

LOUISA [*close to ANN*] Of course she was

ELKIN [*nodding*] H'm [To THADDEUS] I—I am most anxious not to pain you unnecessarily. Er—the conversation you had with your brother Edward at the bedside, in reference to Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore—when he said that he—that he—

JAMES [*breathing heavily*] He'd taken a fancy to her—

ELKIN That he wished to make her a present of jewelry—she was within hearing during that talk?

THADDEUS [*avoiding everybody's gaze, his hands twitching involuntarily at his side*] She—she may have been

ELKIN [*piercingly*] He was left in her charge, you know

THADDEUS She—she was moving about the room—

ELKIN She would scarcely have been far away from him

THADDEUS [*moistening his lips with his tongue*] N-no

ELKIN And when he handed you his keys and asked you to go downstairs and

open the safe—did she hear and witness that also?

THADDEUS She—she—very likely

ELKIN [*raising his voice*] There was nothing at all confidential in this transaction between you and your brother?

THADDEUS Why—why should there have been?

ELKIN Why *should* there have been? [*Coming a step nearer to him*] So that, feeling towards her as he did, there was no reason why, if you hadn't chanced to be on the spot—there was no reason why he shouldn't have held that conversation with *her*, and intrusted *her* with the keys

THADDEUS She—she was almost a stranger to him He—he hadn't seen her since she was a child—

ELKIN [*interrupting him*] Tell us—this illness of Mrs Mortimore's—?

THADDEUS My—my wife's a nervous, delicate woman—always has been—

ELKIN [*nodding*] Quite so

THADDEUS She—she was upset at being alone with Edward when he—when he swooned—

JAMES That was the tale—

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] Although you happened to be in the library, a floor or two below, at the time

THADDEUS He—he might have died suddenly, in her arms She's a nervous, enstive woman—

ELKIN [*nodding*] And she's been unwell ever since [*With an abrupt change of manner*] Mr Mortimore, how is the lock of the safe opened?

THADDEUS Ope d—?

ELKIN [*sharply*] The safe in the library in Cannon Row—how do you open it? [*THADDEUS is silent*] Is it a simple lock, or is there anything unusual about it?

THADDEUS He—he gave me directions how to open it

ELKIN Tell us

THADDEUS I—I forget

ELKIN Forget?

THADDEUS It—it's gone from me

JAMES [*in a low voice*] Gentlemen, you couldn't forget that—

STEPHEN [*in the same way*] You couldn't forget it

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS, solemnly*] Mr Mortimore, are you sure that the conversation at the bedside didn't take place between your brother and your wife solely, and that it wasn't *she* who was sent down stairs to fetch the jewelry?

THADDEUS [*drawing himself up, with a last effort*] Sure !

ELKIN Are you positive that *she* didn't open the safe?

THADDEUS It—it's ridiculous

ELKIN [*quickly*] When you took her to Roper's, the draper's, on the Thursday—you left her there?

THADDEUS Yes, I—I left her

ELKIN Are you sure that *she* didn't then go on to the bridge, and tear up the will, and throw the pieces into the river?

THADDEUS I—I decline to answer any more questions—

ELKIN [*raising his voice again*] Were you in Cannon Row, sir, on the night of June the nineteenth, for a *single moment* between eight o'clock and eleven—?

THADDEUS [*losing his head completely*] Ah! Ah! I know—I know! You mean to drag my wife into this!

ELKIN [*to THADDEUS*] You were late in coming here this afternoon, Mr Mortimore—

THADDEUS [*to ELKIN, threateningly*] Don't you—don't you dare to do it—!

ELKIN Owing, you say, to your having made a communication to Mrs Mortimore about this affair—

THADDEUS [*clinging to the chair which is behind him*] You—you leave my wife out of it—!

ELKIN Are you sure that you were not delayed through having to receive a communication from her—?

THADDEUS [*dropping into the chair*] Don't you—drag her—into it—!

ELKIN Are you sure that the story you have told us, substituting yourself for the principal person of that story, is not exactly the story which she has just told you? [*There is a pause PONTING goes to ROSE*] Mr Vallance

VALLANCE Yes?

ELKIN I propose to see Mrs Mortimore in this matter, without delay

VALLANCE Very good

ELKIN Will you ?

VALLANCE Certainly

[*Quietly, VALLANCE returns to the table and, seating himself, again collects his papers ELKIN is following him*]

JAMES Mr Elkin—

ELKIN [*stopping*] Eh?

JAMES Stealing a will—destroying a will—what is it?

ELKIN What is it?

JAMES The law—what's the law?

ELKIN [*to JAMES*] I—I'm sorry to have to say, sir—it's a felony

THADDEUS [*with a look of horror*]
Oh

[ANN and LOUISA come to JAMES and STEPHEN hurriedly ELKIN sits beside VALLANCE, and, picking up their bags from the floor, they put away their papers]

JAMES [*standing over THADDEUS*]
Well! Are yer proud of her now?

STEPHEN *This is what his marriage has ended in!*

LOUISA I'm not in the least surprised
ANN Old Burdock's daughter!

ROSE [*from the other side of the table*]
Thank heaven, my name isn't Mortimore!

THADDEUS [*leaping to his feet in a frenzy*] Don't you touch her! Don't any of you touch her! Don't you harm a hair of her head! [*To the group on the left*] You've helped to bring this on her! You've helped to make her life unendurable! You've helped to bring her to this! She's been a good wife to me Oh, my God, let me get her away! [*Turning towards the door*] Mr Elkin—Mr Vallance—do let me get her away! Don't you harm a hair of her head! Don't you touch her! [*At the door*] She's been a good wife to me! [*Opening the door and disappearing*] She's been a good wife to me—!

JAMES [*moving over to the right, shouting after THADDEUS*] Been a good wife to you, has she!

STEPHEN [*also moving to the right*]
A disgrace—a disgrace to the family!

LOUISA [*following STEPHEN*] I always said so—I said so till I was tired—

JAMES *We've helped to bring her to this!*

ANN [*sitting in a chair on the nearer side of the dining-table*] A vile creature!

PONTING [*coming forward on the left with ROSE*] Damn the woman! Damn the woman! My position is a cruel one—

STEPHEN [*raising his arms as he paces the room on the right*] Here's a triumph for Hammond!

JAMES [*to PONTING, contemptuously*] Your position—!

LOUISA Nelly Robson's got the better of me now

PONTING [*to JAMES*] I'm landed with an enormous house in Carlos Place—my builders are in it—

ROSE [*pacing the room on the left*] Oh, we're in a shocking scrape! We're up to our necks—!

JAMES [*approaching PONTING*] D'ye think you're the only sufferer—!

STEPHEN [*wildly*] A triumph for Hammond! A triumph for Hammond!

JAMES [*to PONTING*] I've bought all that dirt at the bottom of Gordon Street—acres of it—!

PONTING [*passing him and walking away to the right*] That's your business

STEPHEN [*now, with LOUISA, at the further side of the dining-table*] Hammond and his filthy rag!

JAMES [*going after PONTING, in a fury*] Aye, it is my business—

PONTING [*turning upon him viciously*] I wish to God, sir, I'd never seen or heard of you or your family

ROSE [*coming forward*] O Toby, don't—!

JAMES [*to PONTING*] You wish that, do yer—!

ANN [*rising and placing herself between JAMES and PONTING*] James—!

STEPHEN [*shaking his fists in the air*] Blast Hammond and his filthy rag!

JAMES [*to PONTING*] You patronizing little pauper—!

ROSE [*to JAMES*] Don't you speak to my husband like that—!

PONTING You're a pack of low, common people—!

ROSE [*going to PONTING*] He's the only gentleman among you

JAMES The only gentleman among us—!

STEPHEN [*coming forward with LOUISA*] The only gentleman—!

JAMES We could have done without such a gentleman in our family—[*to ANN, who is forcing him, coaxingly, towards the left*]—hey, Mother?

STEPHEN [*advancing to PONTING, still followed by LOUISA*] Exceedingly well—exceedingly well—

LOUISA [*taking STEPHEN'S arm*] Don't lower yourself—!

JAMES [*over ANN'S shoulder*] The Colonel never came near us the other day till he saw a chance o' picking up the pieces—!

STEPHEN Nor Rose either—neither of them did!

JAMES It's six o' one and half a dozen o' the other!

ROSE [*to JAMES and STEPHEN*] Oh, you cads, you boys—!

JAMES [*mockingly*] Didn't they bustle down to Linchpool in a hurry then! Ha, ha, ha!

STEPHEN [*waving his hand in PONTING'S face*] This serves you right, Colonel, this serves you right

ROSE [*leading PONTING towards the door*] Don't notice them—don't notice them—

JAMES [*to ANN*] I'm in a mess, Mother, I'm in a dreadful mess!

STEPHEN [*sinking into a chair by the tea-table*] On I go at the broken-down rat-hole in King Street, on I go with my worn-out old plant——!

[*On getting to the door, PONTING discovers that ELKIN and VALLANCE have taken their departure. He returns with ROSE to the farther side of the dining-table*]

ANN You must get rid of your contract, James

JAMES Who'll take it—who'll take it——!

STEPHEN I've always been behind the times——

LOUISA Nelly will laugh her teeth out of her head——

PONTING [*to JAMES and STEPHEN, trying to attract their attention*] Mortimore—Mortimore——

ANN [*to JAMES*] It's splendid land, isn't it?

JAMES Nobody's been ass enough to touch it but me!

STEPHEN [*rocking himself to and fro*] Always behind the times—no need to tell me that——

PONTING [*to JAMES*] Mortimore——

JAMES [*to PONTING*] What?

PONTING [*pointing to the empty chairs*] They've gone

JAMES [*sobering down*] Hooked it——

STEPHEN [*looking round*] Gone——?

JAMES Elkin——

STEPHEN [*weakly*] And Vallance——

JAMES They might have had the common civility——

PONTING [*coming forward slowly and dejectedly*] They've gone to that woman——

ROSE [*at the farther side of the table*] I hope they send her to jail—the trull—the baggage!

[*ANN and LOUISA join ROSE*]

PONTING The whole business will be settled between 'em in ten minutes—the whole business

JAMES [*coming to PONTING*] Aye, the whole concern

STEPHEN [*who has risen, holding his head*] Oh, it's awful!

PONTING [*laying a hand on JAMES and STEPHEN who are on either side of him*] My friends, don't let us disagree—we're all in the same boat——

JAMES [*grimly, looking into space*] Aye, they'll be talking it over nicely——

PONTING Let us stick to each other Aren't we throwing up the sponge prematurely——?

JAMES [*not heeding him*] Tad and his wife and the lawyers—ha, ha——!

STEPHEN And that girl——

JAMES [*nodding*] The young lady

PONTING What girl?

STEPHEN Miss Thornhill

PONTING Thornhill——?

JAMES She's staying with 'em

PONTING She is!

ROSE [*coming forward on the left*] Staying with the Tads——?

PONTING In their house! Elkin and Vallance will find her there!

JAMES [*nodding*] Aye

PONTING [*violently*] It's a conspiracy——!

JAMES Conspiracy——?

PONTING I see it! The Thornhill girl's in it! [*He goes to ROSE as ANN and LOUISA come forward on the left*] They're cheating us—they're cheating us! I tell you we ought to be present They're robbing us behind our backs——

STEPHEN [*looking at JAMES*] Jim——?

JAMES [*shaking his head*] No, it's no conspiracy——

PONTING It is! They're robbing us——!

STEPHEN [*to JAMES*] Still, I—I really think——

PONTING Behind our backs!

THE LADIES Yes—yes—yes——

JAMES [*after a pause, quietly, stroking his beard*] By George, we'll go down——!

[*Instantly they all make for the door*]

STEPHEN We'll be there as soon as Elkin——

PONTING A foul conspiracy——!

ANN [*in the rear*] Wait till I put on my hat——

ROSE Jim, you follow with Ann

PONTING [*to STEPHEN*] We'll go on ahead

STEPHEN Yes, we'll go first

LOUISA I'm ready

JAMES No, no, we'll all go together

PONTING Robbing us behind our backs——!

JAMES Look sharp, Mother!

THE OTHERS Be quick—be quick—be quick!

[*Seizing ANN and pushing her before them, they struggle through the doorway*]

ACT IV

Again, the drawing-room in the house of the THADDEUS MORTIMORES VALLANCE is seated at the writing-table by the bay-window, reading aloud from a written paper PHYLLIS, in deep abasement, is upon the settee by the piano, and THADDEUS is standing by her, holding her left hand in both of his. On the left of the table at the end of the piano sits HELEN, pale, calm, and erect, and opposite to her, in the chair on the other side of the table, is ELKIN PONTING is sitting in the bay-window, STEPHEN is standing upon the hearth-rug, and the rest of the "family" are seated about the room—all looking very humble and downcast ANN and LOUISA are upon the settee on the right, ROSE is in the armchair on the nearer side of the fireplace, JAMES on the ottoman ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA are in their outdoor things

VALLANCE [reading] "It was broad daylight before my husband and I got back to our lodgings. The document was then in a pocket I was wearing under my dress. Before going to bed I hid the pocket in a drawer. At about eleven o'clock on the same morning my husband took me to Roper's, the draper's, in Ford Street, and left me there. After my measurements were taken I went up Ford Street and on to the bridge. I then tore up both the paper and the envelope and dropped the pieces into the water."

ELKIN [half turning to PHYLLIS] You declare that that is correct in every particular, Mrs. Mortimore?

[PHYLLIS bursts into a paroxysm of tears]

THADDEUS [to PHYLLIS, as if comforting a child] All right, dear, all right. I'm with you—I'm with you. [She sobs helplessly.] Tell Mr. Elkin—tell him—is that correct?

PHYLLIS [through her sobs] Yes.

ELKIN [to PHYLLIS] You've nothing further to say?

[Her sobbing continues.]

THADDEUS [to PHYLLIS] Have you anything more to say, dear? [Encouragingly, as she tries to speak.] I'm here, dear—I'm with you. Is there anything—anything more—?

PHYLLIS Only—only that I beg Miss Thornhill's pardon. I beg her pardon. Oh, I beg her pardon.

[ELKIN looks at HELEN, who, however, makes no response.]

THADDEUS [to PHYLLIS, glancing at the others] And—and—

PHYLLIS And—and Ann and Jim—and Stephen—and Lou—and Rose and Colonel Ponting—I beg their pardon—I beg their pardon.

[She sinks back upon the settee and her fit of weeping gradually exhausts itself.]

THADDEUS And I—and I, Mr. Elkin. I wish to offer my apologies—my humble apologies—to you and Mr. Vallance—and to everybody—for what took place this afternoon in my brother's dining-room.

ELKIN [kindly] Perhaps it isn't necessary—

THADDEUS Perhaps not—but it's on my mind. [To ELKIN and VALLANCE.] I assure you and Mr. Vallance—[to the others]—and I assure every member of my family—that when I went away from here I had no intention of inventing the story. I attempted to tell you at "Ivanhoe." It came into my mind suddenly—quite suddenly—on my way to Claybrook Road—almost at the gate of the house. I must have been mad to think I could succeed in imposing on you all. I believe I was mad, gentlemen, and that's my excuse, and I hope you'll accept it.

ELKIN Speaking for myself, I accept it freely.

VALLANCE And I.

THADDEUS Thank you—thank you. [He looks at the others wistfully, but they are all staring at the carpet, and they make no response. Then he seats himself beside PHYLLIS and again takes her hand.]

ELKIN [after a pause] Well, Mr. Vallance—[VALLANCE rises, the written paper in his hand, and comes forward on the left.] I think—[glancing over his shoulder at PHYLLIS]—I think that this lady makes it perfectly clear to any reasonable person that the document which she abstracted from the safe in Cannon Row, and subsequently destroyed, was the late Mr. Edward Mortimore's will, and that Miss Thornhill was the universal legatee under it, and was named as the sole executrix. [VALLANCE seats himself in the chair on the extreme left.] As I said in Mr. James Mortimore's house, the advice I shall give to Miss Thornhill is that she applies to the Court for probate of the substance and effect of this will.

VALLANCE Upon an affidavit by Mrs. Thaddeus Mortimore—?

ELKIN An affidavit disclosing what she has done and verifying a statement of the contents of the will

VALLANCE And how, may I ask, are you going to get over your great difficulty?

ELKIN My great difficulty?

VALLANCE The fact that Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore is unable to swear that the will was duly witnessed

PONTING Ah! [*Rising and coming forward but discreetly keeping behind HELEN*] That seems to me to be insuperable—insuperable [*Anxiously*] Eh, Mr Vallance?

STEPHEN [*advancing a step or two*] An obstacle which cannot be got over

PONTING [*eyeing HELEN furtively*] It—ah—may appear rather ungracious to Miss Thornhill—a young lady we hold in the highest esteem—and to whom I express regret for any hasty word I may have used on arriving here—unreserved regret—[*HELEN'S eyes flash, and her shoulders contract, otherwise she makes no acknowledgment*!—it may appear ungracious to Miss Thornhill to discuss this point in her presence, [*pulling at his mustache*] but she will be the first to recognize that there are many—ah—interests at stake

STEPHEN Many interests—many interests—

PONTING And where so many interests are involved, one mustn't—ah—allow oneself to be swayed by anything like sentiment

STEPHEN [*at the round table*] In justice, one *oughtn't* to be sentimental

PONTING One *daren't* be sentimental

LOUISA [*meekly, raising her head*] I always maintain—

STEPHEN [*to LOUISA*] Yes, yes, yes

LOUISA There are two sides—

STEPHEN Yes, yes

ELKIN [*ignoring the interruption*] Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore is prepared to swear, Mr Vallance, that she believes there were other signatures besides the signature of the late Mr Mortimore

VALLANCE But she has no recollection of the names of witnesses—

PONTING None whatever

STEPHEN Not the faintest

VALLANCE Nor as to whether there was an attestation clause at all

PONTING Her memory is an utter blank as to that

STEPHEN An utter blank

[*As PONTING and STEPHEN perk up, there is a rise in the spirits of the ladies at the fireplace ROSE twists her chan-*

round to face the men JAMES doesn't stir]

ELKIN Notwithstanding that, I can't help considering it reasonably probable that, in the circumstances, the Court would presume the will to have been made in due form

PONTING [*walking about agitatedly*] I differ

STEPHEN [*walking about*] So do I

PONTING I don't pretend to a profound knowledge of the law—

STEPHEN As a mere layman, I consider it extremely improbable—extremely improbable

VALLANCE [*to STEPHEN and PONTING*] Well gentlemen, there I am inclined to agree with you—

PONTING [*pulling himself up*] Ah!

STEPHEN [*returning to the round table*] Ah!

VALLANCE I think it doubtful whether, on the evidence of Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore, the will could be upheld

PONTING Exactly [*To everybody*] You've only to look at the thing in the light of common sense—

STEPHEN [*argumentatively, rapping the table*] A will exists or it does not exist—

PONTING If it ever existed, and has been destroyed—

STEPHEN It must be shown that it was a complete will—

PONTING Shown beyond dispute

STEPHEN Complete down to the smallest detail

VALLANCE [*continuing*] At the same time, in my opinion, the facts do not warrant the making of an affidavit that the late Mr Mortimore died intestate

PONTING [*stiffly*] Indeed?

STEPHEN [*depressed*] Really?

VALLANCE And the question of whether or not he left a duly executed will is clearly one for the Court to decide

ELKIN Quite so—quite so

VALLANCE I advise, therefore, that, to get the question determined, the next-of-kin should consent to the course of procedure suggested by Mr Elkin

ELKIN I am assuming their consent

PONTING [*blustering*] And supposing the next-of-kin do not consent, Mr Vallance—?

STEPHEN Supposing we do not consent—?

PONTING Supposing we are convinced—convinced—that the late Mr Mortimore died without leaving a properly executed will?

ELKIN Then the application, instead of being by motion to the judge in Court, must take the form of an action by writ [To VALLANCE] In any case, perhaps it should do so

[There is a pause STEPHEN wanders disconsolately to the window on the right and stands gazing into the garden PONTING leans his elbows on the piano and stares at vacancy]

ELKIN [to HELEN, looking at his watch] Well, my dear Miss Thornhill—?

[VALLANCE rises]

HELEN Wait—wait a moment—

[The sound of HELEN'S voice turns everybody, except JAMES, THADDEUS, and PHYLLIS, in her direction]

ELKIN [to HELEN] Eh?

HELEN Wait a moment, please There is something I want to be told—there's something I want to be told plainly

ELKIN What?

HELEN Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore—

ELKIN Yes?

HELEN [slowly] I want to know whether it is necessary, whatever proceedings are taken on my behalf—whether it is necessary that she should be publicly disgraced I want to know that

ELKIN Whatever course is adopted—motion to the judge or action by writ—Mrs Thaddeus Mortimore's act must be disclosed in open Court

HELEN There are no means of avoiding it?

ELKIN None

HELEN And the offense she has committed is—felony, you say?

[ELKIN inclines his head Again there is silence, during which HELEN sits with knitted brows, and then JAMES rouses himself and looks up]

JAMES What's the—what's the penalty?

ELKIN The—the penalty?

JAMES The legal punishment

ELKIN I think—another occasion—

[Suddenly THADDEUS and PHYLLIS rise together, he with an arm round her, supporting her, and they stand side by side like criminals in the dock]

THADDEUS [quickly] No, no—now—

PHYLLIS [famly] Yes—now—

THADDEUS [to ELKIN and VALLANCE] We—we should like to know the worst, gentlemen I—I had the idea from the first that it was a serious offense—but hardly so serious—

ELKIN [with a wave of the hand] By and by—

THADDEUS Oh, you needn't hesitate, Mr Elkin [Drawing PHYLLIS closer to him] We—we shall go through with it We shall go through with it to the end [A pause] Imprisonment, sir?

ELKIN [gravely] A person convicted of stealing or destroying a will for a fraudulent purpose is liable under the statute to varying terms of penal servitude, or to imprisonment with or without hard labor In this instance, we should be justified, I am sure, in hoping for a considerable amount of leniency

[THADDEUS and PHYLLIS slowly look at one another with expressionless faces JAMES rises and moves away to the fireplace where he stands looking down upon the flowers in the grate VALLANCE goes to the writing-table and puts the written paper into his bag ELKIN rises, takes up his bag from the table at the end of the piano, and is following VALLANCE As he passes HELEN, she lays her hand upon his arm]

HELEN Mr Elkin—

ELKIN [stopping] Yes?

HELEN Oh, but this is impossible

ELKIN Impossible?

HELEN Quite impossible I couldn't be a party—please understand me—I refuse to be a party—to any steps which would bring ruin on Mrs Mortimore

ELKIN [politely] You refuse—?

HELEN Absolutely At any cost—at any cost to me—we must all unite in sparing her and her husband and children

ELKIN My dear young lady, I join you heartily in your desire not to bring suffering upon innocent people But if you decline to take proceedings—

HELEN There is no "if" in the matter—

ELKIN If you decline to take proceedings, there is a deadlock

HELEN A deadlock?

ELKIN As Mr Vallance tells us, it's out of the question that the next-of-kin should now apply for Letters of Administration in the usual way

HELEN Why? I don't see why—I can't see why

ELKIN [pointing to JAMES and STEPHEN] You don't see why neither of these gentlemen can make an affidavit that *Mr Edward Mortimore died intestate!

HELEN [with a movement of the head towards PHYLLIS] She has no remembrance of a—what is it called

PONTING [*eagerly*] Attestation clause
STEPHEN [*coming to the head of the piano*] Attestation clause

HELEN [*haughtily, without turning*]
Thank you [*To ELKIN*] Only the vaguest notion that there *were* witnesses

PONTING The vaguest notion

STEPHEN The haziest

ELKIN Her memory is uncertain there [*To HELEN*] But you know—you know, Miss Thornhill—as we all know—that it was your father's will that was found in the safe at Cannon Row and destroyed

HELEN [*looking up at him, gripping the arms of her chair*] Yes, of course I know it Thank God I know it! I'm happy in knowing it I know he didn't forget me, I know I was all to him that I imagined myself to be And it's because I've come to know this at last—through her—that I can afford to be a little generous to her Oh, please don't think that I want to introduce sentimentality into this affair—[*with a contemptuous glance at PONTING and STEPHEN*—any more than Colonel Ponting does—or Mr Stephen Mortimore Mrs Thaddeus did a cruel thing when she destroyed that will It's no excuse for her to say that she wasn't aware of my existence She was defrauding *some* woman, and, as it happened—I own it now!—defrauding that woman, not only of money, but of what is more valuable than money—of peace of mind, contentment, belief in one who could never speak, never explain, never defend himself However, she has made the best reparation it is in her power to make—and she has gone through a bad time—and I forgive her [*PHYLLIS releases herself from THADDEUS and drops down upon the settee He sits upon the ottoman, burying his face in his hands HELEN rises, struggling to keep back her tears, and turns to the door*] I—I'll go upstairs—if you'll allow me

ELKIN [*between her and the door*] Miss Thornhill, you put us in a position of great difficulty—

HELEN [*impatiently*] I say again, I don't see why Where is the difficulty? [*To VALLANCE and ELKIN*] If there's a difficulty, it's you gentlemen who are raising it Let the affair go on as it was going on [*Turning to JAMES*] Mr Mortimore! [*To ELKIN*] I say, let Mr James Mortimore and the others administer the estate as they intended to do [*JAMES has left the fireplace and slowly advanced to her She addresses him*] Mr Mortimore—

ELKIN [*to HELEN*] Then you would

have Mr James Mortimore deliberately swear that he believes his late brother died without leaving a will?

HELEN Certainly, if necessary Who would be hurt by it?

ELKIN [*pursing his lips*] Miss Thornhill—

HELEN [*hotly*] Why, which do you think would be the more acceptable to the Almighty—that I should send this poor lady to prison, or that Mr James should take a false oath?

ELKIN H'm! I won't attempt to follow you quite so far But even then a most important point would remain to be settled

HELEN Even then

ELKIN Assuming that Mr James Mortimore did make this affidavit—that he were permitted to make such an affidavit

HELEN Yes?

ELKIN What about the disposition of the estate?

HELEN [*nodding, slowly and thoughtfully*] The—the disposition of the estate

[*STEPHEN steals over to PONTING, and ROSE, ALICE, and LOUISA quietly rise and gather together They all listen with painful interest*]

ELKIN [*to HELEN*] Morally, at all events, the whole of the late Mr Mortimore's estate belongs to you

HELEN [*simply*] It was his intention that it should do so [*Looking at JAMES, as if inviting him to speak*] Well ?

JAMES [*stroking his beard*] Look here, Miss Thornhill [*Pointing to the chair on the extreme left*] Sit down a minute [*She sits JAMES also seats himself, facing her, at the right of the table at the end of the piano VALLANCE joins ELKIN, and they stand near HELEN, occasionally exchanging remarks with each other*] Look here [*In a deep, gruff voice*] There is no doubt that my brother Ned's money rightfully belongs to you

PONTING [*nervously*] Mortimore—

JAMES [*turning upon him*] You leave us alone Don't you interfere [*To HELEN*] I've no more doubt about it, Miss Thornhill, than that I'm sitting here Very good Say I make the affidavit, and that we—the family—obtain Letters of Administration What then? The money comes to us Still—it's yours We get hold of it, but it's yours Now! What if we offer to throw the whole lot so to speak into your lap?

STEPHEN [*biting his nails*] Jim—

JAMES [*to STEPHEN*] Don't you interfere [*To HELEN*] I repeat, what if we offer to throw the whole lot into your lap? [*Leaning forward, very earnestly*] Miss Thornhill—

PONTING May I—?

JAMES [*to PONTING*] If you can't be silent—! [*To HELEN*] Miss Thornhill, we're poor, we Mortimores I won't say anything about Rose—[*with a sneer*]—it wouldn't be polite to the Colonel, nor Tad—you see what he's come to But Stephen and me—take our case [*To ELKIN and VALLANCE*] Mr Vallance—Mr Elkin—this is sacred [*To HELEN*] My dear, we're prominent men in the town, both of us, we're looked up to as being fairly warm and comfortable, but in reality we're not much better off than the others My trade's being cut into on all sides, Stephen's business has run to seed, we've no capital, we've never had any capital What we might have saved has been spent on educating our children, and keeping up appearances, and when the time comes for us to be knocked out, there'll be precious little—bar a stroke of luck—precious little for us to end our days on So this is a terrible disappointment to us—an awful disappointment Aye, the money's yours—it's yours—but—[*opening his hands*]—what are you going to do for the family?

[*There is a pause The PONTINGS, STEPHEN, ANN and LOUISA draw a little nearer*]

HELEN [*to JAMES*] Well—since you put it in this way—I'll tell you what I'll do [*Another pause*] I'll share with you all

JAMES [*to the others*] You leave us alone, you leave us alone [*To HELEN*] Share and share alike?

HELEN [*thinking*] Share and share alike—after discharging my obligations

JAMES Obligations?

PONTING and STEPHEN Obligations?

HELEN After carrying out my father's instructions with regard to his old servants

JAMES [*nodding*] Oh, aye

PONTING [*walking about excitedly*] That's a small matter

STEPHEN [*also walking about*] A trifle—a trifle—

PONTING Then what it amounts to is this—the estate will be divided into five parts instead of four

STEPHEN Five instead of four—obviously

HELEN [*still thinking*] No—into six

JAMES Six?

PONTING and STEPHEN Six?

ROSE and LOUISA [*who with ANN are moving around the head of the piano to join PONTING and STEPHEN*] Six!

HELEN [*firmly*] Six A share must be given, as a memorial to my father, to one of the hospitals in Linchpool

PONTING and STEPHEN [*protestingly*] Oh—!

ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA Oh—!

PONTING Entirely unnecessary

STEPHEN Uncalled for

HELEN I insist

PONTING [*coming to HELEN*] My dear Miss Thornhill, believe me—believe me—these cadging hospitals are a great deal too well off as it is

HELEN I insist that a share shall be given to a Linchpool hospital

PONTING I could furnish you with details of maladministration on the part of hospital-boards—

ROSE Shocking mismanagement—

STEPHEN There's our own hospital—

LOUISA A scandal

STEPHEN Our Jubilee hospital—

ANN It's scarcely fit to send your servants to

HELEN [*to JAMES, rising*] Mr Mortimore—

JAMES [*rising, to PONTING and the rest*] Miss Thornhill says that one share of the estate's to go to a Linchpool hospital D'ye hear? [*Moving towards them authoritatively*] That's enough

[*PONTING and STEPHEN bustle to the writing-table, where they each seize a sheet of paper and proceed to reckon ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA surround them JAMES stands by, his hands in his pockets, looking on*]

PONTING [*sitting at the writing-table—in an undertone*] A hundred and seventy thousand pounds

STEPHEN [*bending over the table—in an undertone*] Six into seventeen—two and carry five

PONTING Six into fifty—eight and carry two

STEPHEN Six into twenty

PONTING Three

[*HELEN seats herself in the chair on the right of the table at the end of the piano ELKIN and VALLANCE are now in earnest conversation on the extreme left While the calculation is going on, THADDEUS and PHYLLIS raise their heads and look at each other*]

STEPHEN Carry two

PONTING Six into twenty again—three and carry two

STEPHEN Again, six into twenty—three and carry two

PONTING Six into forty—six and carry four

STEPHEN Six into forty-eight

PONTING Eight

STEPHEN Twenty-eight thousand, three hundred and thirty-three pounds, six shilling and eight pence

PONTING [*rising, his paper in his hand*] Twenty-eight thousand apiece

THADDEUS [*rising*] No!

PHYLLIS [*rising*] No!

THADDEUS [*as everybody turns to him*] No, no—

JAMES Eh?

PONTING [*to THADDEUS*] What do you mean, sir?

STEPHEN [*to THADDEUS*] What do you mean?

THADDEUS [*agitatedly*] I don't take my share—my wife and I don't take our share—we don't touch it—

PHYLLIS [*clinging to THADDEUS*] We won't touch it—oh, no, no, no, no—!

JAMES [*to THADDEUS*] Don't be a fool—don't be a fool!

THADDEUS Fool or no fool—not a penny—

PHYLLIS Not a penny of it—

THADDEUS Not a penny

HELEN Very well, then [*In a clear voice*] Very well, Mr Thaddeus Mortimore will not accept his share

PONTING [*with alacrity*] He declines it

HELEN He declines it

PONTING That alters the figures—alters the figures—

STEPHEN Very materially

ROSE [*to ANN and LOUISA*] Only five to share instead of six

ANN [*bewildered*] I don't understand

LOUISA [*shaking her arm*] Five instead of six!

[*Laying his paper on the top of the piano, PONTING produces his pocket-pencil and makes a fresh calculation*]
STEPHEN stands at his elbow ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA gather round them]

STEPHEN [*in an undertone*] A hundred and seventy thousand

PONTING [*in an undertone*] Five into, seventeen

STEPHEN Three

PONTING Five into twenty

STEPHEN Thirty-four thousand exactly

PONTING Thirty-four thousand apiece

ROSE, ANN, and LOUISA [*to each other*] Thirty-four thousand!

HELEN Wait—wait Wait, please [*After a short pause*] Mr Thaddeus Mortimore refuses to accept his share I am sorry—but he appears determined

THADDEUS •Determined — determined

PHYLLIS Determined

HELEN That being so, I ask that his share shall be settled upon his boy and girl [*To ELKIN*] Mr Elkin [*ELKIN advances to her*] I suppose an arrangement of that kind can easily be made?

ELKIN [*with a shrug*] Mr Thaddeus Mortimore can assent to his share being handed over to the trustees of a Deed of Settlement for the benefit of his children, giving a release to the administrator from all claims in respect of his share

HELEN [*turning to THADDEUS*] You've no objection to this? [*THADDEUS and PHYLLIS stare at HELEN dumbly, with parted lips*] They're great friends of mine—Cyril and Joyce—and I hope they'll remain so [*There is a pause*] Well? You've no right to stand in their light [*There is a pause*] You won't, surely, stand in their light? [*A pause*] Don't

[*Again there is silence, and then PHYLLIS, leaving THADDEUS, totters forward, and drops on her knees before HELEN, bowing her head in HELEN'S lap*]

PHYLLIS [*weeping*] Oh-oh-oh—!
[*Calmly, HELEN disengages herself from PHYLLIS, rises, and walks away to the fireplace THADDEUS lifts PHYLLIS from the ground and leads her to the open window They stand there, facing the garden, she crying upon his shoulder*]

ELKIN [*advancing to the middle of the room, with the air of a man who is about to perform an unpleasant task*] Miss Thornhill—[*HELEN turns to him*]—Mr Vallance and I—[*to VALLANCE*]—Mr Vallance—[*VALLANCE advances*]—Mr Vallance and I have come to the conclusion that, as all persons interested in this business are *sui juris* and agreeable to the compromise which has been proposed, nobody would be injured by the next-of-kin applying for Letters of Administration

VALLANCE [*to ELKIN*] Except the Revenue

ELKIN [*indifferently, with a nod*] The Revenue

VALLANCE The legacy duty being at three per cent instead of ten

ELKIN [*nodding*] H'm, h'm! [*To HELEN*] But, my dear young lady, we have also to say that, with the information we possess, we do not see our way clear to act in the matter any further

VALLANCE [*to JAMES, who has come forward on the left*] We certainly could not be parties to the making of an affidavit that the deceased died intestate

ELKIN We couldn't reconcile ourselves to that

VALLANCE We leave it, therefore, to the next-of-kin to take their own course for obtaining Letters of Administration

ELKIN In fact, we beg to be allowed to withdraw from the affair altogether I speak for myself, at any rate

VALLANCE [*emphatically*] Altogether

JAMES [*after a pause*] Oh, all right, Mr Elkin, all right, Mr Vallance

HELEN [*to ELKIN*] Then—do I lose you—?

ELKIN I am afraid—for the present—

HELEN [*with dignity*] As you please I am very grateful to you for what you have done for me

ELKIN [*looking round*] If I may offer a last word of advice, it is that you should avoid putting the terms of this compromise into writing

VALLANCE [*assentingly*] Each party must rely upon the other to fulfil the terms honorably

ELKIN [*to HELEN*] You have no legal right to enforce those terms, but pray remember that, in the event of any breach of faith, there would be nothing to prevent you propounding the will even after Letters of Administration have been granted

JAMES Breach of faith, sir—!

PONTING and STEPHEN Oh—!

JAMES There's no need, Mr Elkin—
ELKIN No, no, no—not the slightest, I'm convinced [*To Helen, taking her hand*] The little hotel in London—Norfolk Street—?

HELEN Till I'm suited with lodgings

ELKIN Mrs Elkin will write

HELEN My love to her [*He smiles at her and leaves her, as VALLANCE comes to her and takes her hand*]

VALLANCE Good-bye

HELEN Good-bye

ELKIN [*to those on the left*] Good afternoon

A MURMUR Good afternoon

VALLANCE [*to those on the left*] Good afternoon

A MURMUR Good afternoon

[*JAMES has opened the door ELKIN and VALLANCE, carrying their bags, go out JAMES follows them, closing the door*]

PONTING [*coming forward*] Ha! We can replace those gentlemen without much difficulty

STEPHEN [*coming forward*] Old Crake has gone to pieces and this fellow Vallance is playing ducks and drakes with the practice—ducks and drakes

PONTING [*offering his hand to HELEN, who takes it perfunctorily*] Greatly indebted to you—greatly indebted to you for meeting us half-way and saving unpleasantness

STEPHEN Pratt is the best lawyer in the town—the best by far

PONTING [*to HELEN*] Nothing like a compromise, provided it can be arrived at—ah—

STEPHEN Without loss of self-respect on both sides [*JAMES returns*]

PONTING [*to JAMES*] Mortimore, we'll go back to your house There are two or three things to talk over

[*ROSE comes to HELEN as PONTING goes to STEPHEN and JAMES*]

ROSE [*shaking hands with HELEN*] We sha'n't be settled in Carlos Place till the autumn, but directly we are settled

HELEN [*distantly*] Thank you

ROSE Everybody flocks to my Tuesdays Let me have your address, and I'll send you a card

[*ROSE leaves HELEN, making way for LOUISA and STEPHEN*]

LOUISA [*to HELEN*] Don't forget the Crescent Whenever you want to visit your dear father's birthplace—

STEPHEN [*benevolently*] And if there should be any little ceremony over laying the foundation-stone of the new *Times and Mirror* building—

LOUISA There's the spare bedroom

[*They shake hands with her and, making way for ANN and JAMES, follow the PONTINGS, who have gone out*]

ANN [*shaking hands with HELEN, gloomily*] The next time you stay at "Ivanhoe," I hope you'll unpack more than one small trunk But, there—[*kissing her*]
—I bear no malice

[*She follows the others, leaving JAMES with HELEN*]

JAMES [*to HELEN, gruffly, wringing*

her hand] Much obliged to you, my dear, much obliged to you

HELEN [after glancing over her shoulder in a whisper] Mr Mortimore

JAMES Eh?

HELEN [with a motion of her head in the direction of THADDEUS and PHYLLIS] These two—these two

JAMES [lowering his voice] What about 'em?

HELEN She's done a wrong thing, but recollect—you all profit by it You don't disdain, any of you, to profit by it [He looks at her queerly, but straight in the eyes] Try to make their lives a little easier for them

JAMES Easier ?

HELEN Happier You can influence the others, if you will [After a pause] Will you?

[He reflects, shakes her hand again, and goes to the door]

JAMES [at the door, sharply] Tad ! [THADDEUS turns] See you in the morning Phyllis ! [She also turns to him, half scared at his tone] See you both in the morning [Nodding to her] Good-bye, old girl

[He disappears HELEN is now standing upon the hearth-rug, her hands behind her, looking down into the grate THADDEUS and PHYLLIS glance at her, then, guiltily, they too move to the door, passing round the head of the piano]

PHYLLIS [at the door in a low, hard voice] Helen [HELEN partly turns] You're leaving to-morrow I'll keep out of your way—I'll keep up-stairs to my room—till you've gone

[She goes out THADDEUS is following her, when HELEN calls to him]

HELEN Mr Thaddeus [He closes the door and advances to her humbly She comes forward] There's no reason why I should put your wife to that trouble It's equally convenient to me to return to London this evening [He bows] Will you kindly ask Kate to pack me?

THADDEUS Certainly

HELEN Er—[thinking]—Mr Trist had some calls to make after we left the flower-show If I've gone before he comes back, tell him I'll write

THADDEUS [bowing again] You'll write

HELEN And explain

THADDEUS [under his breath, looking up quickly] Explain

HELEN Explain, among other things,

that I've yielded to the desire of the family—

THADDEUS Desire ?

HELEN That I should accept a share of my father's property

THADDEUS [falteringly] Thank you—thank you

HELEN [after a while] That's all, I think

THADDEUS [offering his hand to her] I—I wish you every happiness, Miss Thornhill [She places her hand in his] I—I wish you every happiness

[She inclines her head in acknowledgment, and again he goes to the door, and again, turning away to the round table where she trifles with a book, she calls him]

HELEN Oh, Mr Tad— [He halts] Mr Tad, I propose that we allow six months to pass in complete silence—six months from to-day—

THADDEUS [dully, not understanding] Six months—silence—?

HELEN I mean, without my hearing from your wife Then perhaps, she—she will send me another invitation—

THADDEUS [leaving the door, staring at her] Invitation—?

HELEN By that time, we shall, all of us, have forgotten a great deal—sha'n't we? [Facing him] You'll say that to her for me?

[He hesitates, then he takes her hands and, bending over them, kisses them repeatedly]

THADDEUS God bless you God bless you God bless you

HELEN [withdrawing her hands] Find—Kate—

[Once more he makes for the door]

THADDEUS [stopping half-way and pulling himself together] Miss Thornhill—my wife—my wife—you've seen her at a disadvantage—a terrible disadvantage Few—few pass through life without being seen—once—or oftener—at a disadvantage She—she's a splendid woman—a splendid woman—a splendid wife and mother [Moving to the door] They haven't appreciated her—the family haven't appreciated her They've treated her abominably, for sixteen years she's been treated abominably [At the door] But I've never regretted my marriage—[defiantly]—I've never regretted it—never, for a single moment—never regretted it—never—never regretted it—

[He disappears She goes to the table at

the end of the piano and takes up her drawing-block and box of crayons As she does so, TRIST lets himself into the garden She pauses, listening, and presently he enters the room at the open window]

TRIST [*throwing his hat on the round table*] Ah——!

HELEN [*animatedly*] Mr Trist——

TRIST Yes? •

HELEN Run out to the post-office for me—send a telegram in my name——

TRIST With pleasure

HELEN Gregory's Hotel, Norfolk Street, Strand, London—the manager Miss Thornhill will arrive to-night—prepare her room——

TRIST [*his face falling*] To-night!

HELEN I've altered my plans Gregory's Hotel—Gregory's——

TRIST [*picking up his hat*] Norfolk Street, Strand——

HELEN [*at the door*] Mr Trist—I want you to know—I—I've come into a small fortune

TRIST A fortune——?

HELEN Nearly thirty thousand pounds

TRIST Thirty thousand——!

HELEN They've persuaded me to take a share of my poor father's money

TRIST I—I'm glad

HELEN You—you think I'm doing rightly?

TRIST [*depressed*] Why—of course

[*She opens the door and he goes to the window*]

HELEN Mr Trist——! [*She comes back*

into the room] Mr Trist——! [*He approaches her*] Mr Trist—don't—don't——

TRIST What?

HELEN [*her head drooping*] Don't let this make any difference between us—will you——?

[*She raises her eyes to his and they stand looking at each other in silence Then she turns away abruptly and leaves the room as he hurries through the garden*]

THE END

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DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF

(1908)

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

CAST

MRS HARRY TELFER, *Dolly*
HARRY TELFER, *her husband*
MATTHEW BARRON, *her father*
CAPTAIN LUCAS WENTWORTH, *her cousin*
PETERS, *her maid*
CRIDDLE
THE REV JAMES PILCHER, *Vicar of Crookbury*
PROFESSOR STURGESS
MRS STURGESS, *Rene*

*The action of the play takes place in the drawing-room of HARRY
TELFER's house at Crookbury Green, Surrey*

ACT I The afternoon of January 1st, 1907
ACT II After dinner on the same day
ACT III The same night—later
ACT IV The afternoon of January 1st, 1908

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

WHEN Henry Arthur Jones and Sir Arthur Pinero began writing plays in the eighties, the English theater had surrendered almost entirely to melodrama, burlesque, farce, flashy pantomime, pilferings from the current French drama, and revivals of old English plays. Current English drama was hopelessly divorced from literature in an age when the Englishman's poetry was being written by Browning, Tennyson, and Swinburne, his novels by Meredith, George Eliot, and Hardy, his essays by Arnold, Ruskin, and Carlyle—his plays were being written by such mediocrities as Tom Taylor, H. J. Byron, W. G. Wills, and James Albery. To Jones and Pinero belong great credit for the ushering in of a new dramatic movement which was destined in a generation's time to produce a dramatic literature second only to that of the Elizabethan age. In this renaissance Pinero was the channel for those new currents which had already shaken the Continental theater out of its lethargy, whereas Jones was relatively unaffected by foreign influences and led the fight for a mature and civilized indigenous drama.

Henry Arthur Jones was born in 1851, the son of a Buckinghamshire farmer. Although his formal schooling was meager, he possessed excellent substitutes for a college education—an insatiable curiosity about life, a great love of reading, an enormous capacity for learning, and a busy and varied career that brought him into intimate contact with people in all walks of life. After his boyhood on the farm, he worked in a draper's shop, was later traveling salesman for several years in the west of England, and by 1878, when his first play was produced, he was a clerk in a London office. He learned the craft of playwriting in the theater itself, which he visited nightly. His first success came with *The Silver King* (1882), considered the best melodrama of the nineteenth century. He devoted himself to the cause of the new drama with evangelical fervor. He wrote and lectured tirelessly for fifty years as a propagandist for a freer theater, abolition of the censorship, copyright reform, revival of the old practice of printing plays, recognition of the drama as literature. He was the knight errant of the dramatic renaissance, a "Cyrano in Whiskers." A comic journal described him. He wrote exactly one hundred plays. He was at the height of his fame and influence in the eighties, nineties, and the early years of this century before the success of a counter-movement was to deliver the theater into the hands of the new intellectuals—Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy, Maugham, and their followers. Jones died in 1929.

Most of his plays seem hopelessly old-fashioned to-day. At his best perhaps only an embryonic artist, he is an important foundation stone in the structure of the modern drama. To him is due in no small part the impetus that brought literature again into the theater, and with Pinero he served as a pioneer to prepare the way for the greater dramatists of the period. *Saints and Sinners* (1884) was the first modern English play with a social significance, *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894), *The Liars* (1897), *White-washing Julia* (1903), *Dolly Reforming Herself* (1908), and *Mary Goes First* (1913) helped restore to popularity the comedy of manners, one of the glories of English drama, *Michael and His Lost Angel* (1896), *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900), *The Hypocrites* (1906), and *The Lie* (1914) are notable examples of the "strong" drama popular a generation ago.

Jones's best work is with the comedy of manners. *The Liars* is generally regarded as

the finest high comedy of its century—brilliant and witty, mirroring faithfully the manners of its age. Although it ran for a year in London, *Dolly Reforming Herself* is less widely known. It is, however, more consistently comic in tone, successfully avoiding the pitfall of sentimentality which weakens most of the old comedies. The clock-like construction may be a bit too precise, but the characters are convincing, the dialogue bright, and the ending free from sentimental concessions. An excellent scene is the quarrel between the Telfers, a duologue which has often been compared to the similar quarrel in *The School for Scandal*. C. E. Montague says of the scene that “like a true squall it has variety, the winds of wrath frequently changing their direction and velocity and the rain doing its office with much fidelity to nature. The people talk, too, as people do in rages, abruptly, slangily, without thought of how each sentence will end.” Professor Sturgess, Jones drew from life—from his friend Herbert Spencer.

DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF

ACT I

SCENE—*Drawing-room at HARRY TELFER'S, The Gables, Crookbury Green, Surrey* A well-furnished room in a modern red brick country house At the back, a little to the right, is a door leading into the hall with backing of a door All along the right side is a glass partition, showing a conservatory which is entered by glass doors, one up stage, the other down On the left side is a large fireplace At the back, in the center, is a handsome writing-desk with a shut down flap lid Above the fireplace, facing the audience, is a large sofa To the right of sofa, and below it in the left center of the room, is a small table, and near to it an easy chair Right center down stage is a larger table

TIME—*The afternoon of 1st January, 1907*

Discover at writing-table, back to audience, DOLLY TELFER, a bright little woman about thirty, busied with bills and papers Bending over her, back to audience, is her father, MATT BARRON, a pleasant-looking, easy-going cymc of sixty HARRY TELFER, DOLLY's husband, an ordinary good-natured, weakish, impulsive Englishman about thirty-five, is standing with his back to the fire Sitting on arm-chair, reading a scientific book, is PROFESSOR STURGESS, a hard, dry, narrow, fattish scientific man about forty-five At the table, right, reading a French novel, is RENIE STURGESS, the Professor's wife, a tall, dark, handsome woman about twenty-seven

HARRY No, I can't say that I pay very much attention to sermons as a rule, but Pilcher gave us a regular, downright, no-mistake-about it, rouser at the Watch-night Service last night

MATT [*turning around*] I wonder what precise difference this rousing sermon will make in the conduct of any person who heard it

HARRY Well, it's going to make a lot of

difference in my conduct At least, I v n t say a lot of difference, because I don't call myself a very bad sort of fellow, do you?

MATT N-o—no —

HARRY At any rate, I'm a thundering good husband, ain't I, Dolly? [*DOLLY takes no notice*] And I've got no flagrant vices But I've got a heap of—well, a heap of selfish little habits, such as temper, and so on, and for the coming year I'm going to knock them all off

MATT That will be a score for Pilcher—that is, if you do knock them off

HARRY Oh, I'm thoroughly resolved! I promised Dolly last night, didn't I, Dolly? [*DOLLY takes no notice*] Do'lly too! Dolly was awfully impressed by the sermon, weren't you, Dolly?

MATT [*looking round at DOLLY'S back*] Dolly was awfully impressed?

HARRY Yes Before we went to bed she gave me her word, that if I'd give her a little help, she'd pay off all her bills, and live within her allowance for the future, didn't you, Dolly?

MATT Well, that will be another score for Pilcher—that is, if Dolly does live within her allowance

HARRY Oh, Dolly means it this time, don't you, Dolly?

DOLLY [*turns round on her stool, bills in hand*] I think it's disgraceful!

MATT What?

DOLLY These tradespeople! [*Comes down to MATT*] I'm almost sure I've paid this bill once—if not twice Then there's a mistake of thirty shillings in the addition—you're good at figures, Dad Do add that up for me My head is so muddled

[*Giv ng the bill to MATT*]

HARRY Aren't you glad, Doll, that you made that resolution not to have any more bills?

DOLLY It will be heavenly! To go about all day with the blessed thought that I don't owe a farthing to anybody It's awful!

[*Crunching a bill in her hand, and throwing it on to the writing-table*]

HARRY Cheer up, little woman! You

don't owe such a very alarming amount, do you?

DOLLY Oh no! Oh no! And if you'll only help me as you promised—

HARRY We'll go thoroughly into it by and by. In fact, I did mean to give you a pleasant little Christmas surprise, and pay off all your debts.

DOLLY Oh, you angel! But why didn't you do it?

HARRY I've done it so often! You remember the last time?

DOLLY [*making a wry face*] Yes, I remember the last time.

HARRY And here we are again!

DOLLY Oh, don't talk like a clown!

HARRY But, my dear Dolly, here we are again.

DOLLY Well, I haven't got the money sense! I simply haven't got it! I was born without it!

MATT [*handing her the bill*] The addition was quite correct.

DOLLY [*taking the bill*] You're sure? Then I'm convinced I've paid it! [*Looking at bill*] Yes! Thirty-four, seven, six Professor Sturgess—

PROF [*looks up from his book*] Yes?

DOLLY You understand all about psychology and the way our brains work.

PROF I've given my entire life to their study, but I cannot claim that I understand them.

DOLLY But wouldn't you say—

PROF What?

DOLLY I'm morally certain I've paid this bill.

MATT Have you got the receipt?

DOLLY No! I must have mislaid it.

MATT When, and where did you pay it?

DOLLY I cannot recall the exact circumstances. And now—

MATT And now—?

DOLLY Fulks and Garner have sent me a most impertinent note requesting immediate payment.

PROF What is the particular brain process that you wish me to explain?

DOLLY How do you account for my having the most vivid impression that I've paid it—so vivid that I cannot shake it off?

PROF Well—a—

MATT Isn't it an instance of that obscure operation of the feminine mind whereby the merest wish becomes an accomplished fact?

DOLLY My dear Dad, I actually remember the exact amount thirty-four,

seven, six. Thirty-four, seven, six. I shall never enter Fulks and Garner's shop again!

[*Enter CRIDDLE*]

CRIDDLE [*announcing*] Captain Went worth!

[*Enter CAPTAIN LUCAS WENTWORTH, a good-looking smart young army man about thirty. He is in riding clothes. Exit CRIDDLE. At CAPTAIN WENTWORTH'S entrance RENIE shows keen interest, throws him a secret glance as he goes to shake hands with DOLLY*]

DOLLY Ah, Lu! What, over again! Happy New Year once more!

LUCAS Same to you [*Shaking hands*]. Happy New Year, everybody! Good afternoon, Harry!

HARRY Ditto, Lu.

LUCAS Ah, Uncle Matt! Happy New Year!

MATT Happy New Year, Lucas!

LUCAS Good afternoon, Mrs Sturgess.

RENIE Good afternoon.

LUCAS None the worse for your outing last night, I hope?

RENIE Oh no, I'm sure Mr Pilcher's sermon ought to make us all very much better.

DOLLY May I introduce you to Professor Sturgess—my cousin Captain Wentworth.

LUCAS How d'ye do?

PROF How d'ye do?

MATT So you came over to the Watch-night Service, I hear?

LUCAS Yes! I'd nothing much better to do, and Dolly was cracking up this new parson of yours, so I thought I'd jog over and sample him.

MATT A dozen miles over here at midnight, an hour's service in a cold church, and a dozen miles back to Aldershot, in the sleet and snow. I hope the sermon thoroughly braced you up!

LUCAS It did. It made me feel just as good as I knew how to be.

MATT Here's another score for Pilcher!

DOLLY Dad, I think it's shocking bad taste of you to keep on sneering at Mr Pilcher!

MATT I'm not sneering. I'm only curious to follow up this wonderful sermon, and trace its results on all of you.

DOLLY Well, you can see its results [*LUCAS has got near to RENIE, stands with his back to her, takes out a letter from his coat-tail pocket, holds it out for her to take. She takes it, pops it into her novel, and goes on reading. He moves away from her*]. Take only our own family

Harry and I have both turned over a new leaf Renie, you said Mr Pilcher had set you thinking deeply—

RENIE Yes, dear, very deeply

DOLLY Lu, you said the sermon had done you a lot of good

LUCAS Heaps! I won't say I'm going to set up for a saint straight off, because—well—I'm not so sure I could bring it off, even if I tried—

MATT That's what holds me back, my wretched nervous fear that I shouldn't bring it off Still, in justice to Pilcher, I hope you're not going to let his sermon be wasted

LUCAS Oh, no! My first spare five minutes I'm going to brisk about, and do a bit of New Year's tidying up

[He is standing over RENIE, who has opened his letter in her novel, he again exchanges a secret look of understanding with her, and makes a sign to her to go into the conservatory]

[Enter CRIDDLE]

CRIDDLE *[announcing]* Mr Pilcher!

[Enter the REVEREND JAMES PILCHER, a big, strong, bright, genial, manly, hearty English parson about forty Exit CRIDDLE]

DOLLY How d'ye do?

[Shaking hands]

PILCHER How d'ye do? Happy New Year, once more! Happy New Year, Mr Barron!

MATT *[shaking hands]* A happy New Year!

PILCHER How d'ye do again, Telfer?

HARRY How are you?

PILCHER Good morning, Mrs Sturgess

RENIE Good morning

[At PILCHER'S entrance she has hidden her French novel behind her in the chair In shaking hands with PILCHER it drops to the floor and LUCAS'S letter drops out LUCAS goes to pick it up, PILCHER is before him, picks up the novel and letter, looks at title of book, and hands them to RENIE In taking them she shows some confusion]

PILCHER *[genially]* Improving the New Year by getting a thorough knowledge of Parisian life and manners, I see

RENIE *[confused]* No!—I had begun the book a week ago and so I thought—I'd better finish it

LUCAS Good afternoon, Mr Pilcher

PILCHER Good afternoon

LUCAS Rattling good sermon you gave us last night

PILCHER I'm glad you thought it worth coming so far to hear

LUCAS Not at all Jolly well worth coming twice as far for, eh, Mrs Sturgess?

RENIE I thoroughly enjoyed it!

PILCHER *[a little surprised]* Enjoyed it! Now I meant to make you all very uncomfortable!

DOLLY Oh, you gave us a good shaking up, and we deserved it! I don't think you've met Professor Sturgess?

PILCHER No, but I've read his book, "Man, the Automaton"

PROF *[bowing]* Not with disapproval, I trust?

PILCHER *[shaking hands very cordially]* With the most profound disapproval, with boundless, uncompromising dissent and antagonism!

PROF I'm sorry!

PILCHER Why, you deny that man has any vestige of free will!

PROF Certainly The longer I live, the more I'm convinced that free will is a purely subjective illusion

DOLLY Do you mean that when I will to do a certain thing I can't do it? Oh, that's absurd For instance, I will to go and touch that chair! *[She goes and touches it]* There! *[Triumphantly]* I've done it! That shows I've got free will *[The PROFESSOR shakes his head]* Well, then, how did I do it?

PROF I affirm that your willing to touch that chair or not to touch it, your actual touching it, or not touching it, your possession or non-possession of a criminal impulse—

DOLLY I haven't any criminal impulses—

PROF *[shakes his head and goes on]* Your yielding to that criminal impulse or your not yielding to it—all these states of consciousness are entirely dependent upon the condition, quantity and arrangement of certain atoms in the gray matter of your brain You think, you will, you act according as that gray matter works You did not cause or make that condition of the atoms of your gray matter, therefore you are not responsible for thinking or acting in this way or that, seeing that your thoughts, and your actions, and that direction of your impulses which you call your will, are all precisely determined and regulated by the condition and arrangement of these minute atoms of your gray matter!

DOLLY *[has at first listened with great attention, but has grown bewildered as the PROFESSOR goes on]* I don't care any—

thing about my gray matter! I've quite made up my mind I won't have any more bills!

PILCHER Does Mrs Sturgess agree with the Professor's doctrine?

RENIE No, indeed! To say that we're mere machines—it's horrid

PROF The question is not whether it's horrid, but whether it's true

PILCHER What do you think, Mr Barron?

MATT It's a very nutty and knotty problem I'm watching to see Dolly and Harry solve it!

DOLLY See us solve it! How?

MATT You and Harry heard a most thrilling, soul-stirring sermon last night

PILCHER You had good hearsay accounts of my sermon?

MATT Excellent! I should have heard it myself, but I've reached an age when it would be dangerous to give up any of my old and cherished bad habits So in place of going to church and selfishly reforming myself, I must be content with watching Dolly and Harry reform themselves

DOLLY Don't take any notice of him, Mr Pilcher, he's the most cynical, hardened reprobate! I have to blush for him a hundred times a day

[*RENIE strolls casually into conservatory by lower door LUCAS casually follows her*]

MATT And in order to settle once and for all this vexed question of free will and moral responsibility, I'll bet you, Harry, a simple fiver, and I'll bet you, Dolly, a new Parisian hat and a half a dozen pairs of gloves, that you won't live up to your good resolutions, and that on next New Year's Day you'll neither of you be one ha-penny the better for all the wise counsels Mr Pilcher gave you last night

HARRY A fiver! Done!

DOLLY I'll take you, too! In fact, I'll double it, two new Parisian hats, and a dozen pairs of gloves!

MATT Done, my dear!

PILCHER I hope I sha'n't be accused of talking shop if I venture to recall that betting was one of the bad habits I especially warned my congregation against, last night!

HARRY By Jove, yes—I'd forgotten all about that! Of course, if you wish us to cry off—

PILCHER Well, not exactly I might perhaps suggest an alternative plan which was tried with great success in my late parish—

DOLLY What was that?

PILCHER A very capital good fellow—an auctioneer and land surveyor, my churchwarden in fact, by name Jobling—found that in spite of constant good resolutions, certain small vices were gradually creeping upon him There was an occasional outburst of temper to his clerks, an occasional half glass too much, and on one lamentable market day, he actually discovered himself using bad language to Mrs Jobling—

DOLLY [*looking at HARRY*] Oh! Ah!

MATT Jobling's gray matter can't have been in good working order

PILCHER We corrected that! We got his gray matter under control

DOLLY How?

PILCHER My Christmas Blanket Club happened to be on the road to bankruptcy By the way, our Blanket Club here is in low water Well, I gave Jobling a small box with a hole at the top sufficiently large to admit a half crown And I suggested that whenever he was betrayed into one of these little slips, he should fine himself for the benefit of my Blanket Club—

HARRY Good business! Do'ly, where's that collecting-box they sent us from the Hospital for Incurables?

DOLLY In the cupboard in the next room

HARRY Right-o! No time like the present!

[*Exit*]

MATT And how did you get out of this dilemma?

PILCHER Dilemma?

MATT Did your Blanket Club remain in bankruptcy, or what must have been an even more distressing alternative to you, did Jobling continue to use bad language to his wife?

PILCHER We struck a happy medium My Blanket Club balance was considerably augmented, and Jobling's behavior considerably improved under the stress of the fines

[*Re-enter HARRY with an old, dusty collecting-box on which is printed in large letters, "County Hospital for Incurables"*]

HARRY [*placing the box on the table*] There! My name's Jobling for the present! By Jove! that was a very neat idea of yours

PILCHER Ah, by the way, I didn't give you Jobling's tariff—

HARRY Tariff?

PILCHER Jobling's tariff for a mild little profanity like "By Jove," was a mere sixpence

HARRY Oh! [*Feels in his pocket*]

PILCHER Of course you needn't adopt Jobbing's scale

HARRY Oh yes! I'll toe the mark!
[Takes sixpence out of his pocket and puts it in his box] I'm determined I'll cure myself of all these bad little tricks—

MATT [to DOLLY, pointing to the money-box] Are you going to contribute?

DOLLY [snappishly] Perhaps, when I've paid off my bills

MATT [to FILCHER] Will you kindly let my daughter have your lowest tariff for ladies?

DOLLY Oh, please don't be in such a hurry What about your own contribution? Mr Pilcher, I hope you don't intend to let my father escape

PILCHER I understood Mr Barron was prepared to risk a five-pound note that you and Mr Telfer will not carry your New Year resolutions into practice?

MATT With the almost certain chance of diawing a five-pound note from Harry and a new hat from Dolly

PILCHER I'm afraid I can't hold out those inducements But I can offer you the very pleasing alternatives of chuckling over your daughter's and Mr Telfer's lapses, or of contributing five pounds to an excellent charity!

MATT H'm! Well, I'll do my best to oblige you, Mr Pilcher! Let me see!

[Looking round, his eye falls on RENIE and LUCAS who, at the beginning of the above conversation have gone into conservatory at lower door, and now come out again at upper door She has a hot-house flower in her hand, and they are eagerly absorbed in their conversation The PROFESSOR is reading and not noticing]

RENIE [becoming aware that MATT is watching them] Yes, that arrangement of the stamens is quite unusual It's what the gardener calls a "sport"—

LUCAS [examining the flower] Jolly good sport, too!

MATT I'm not so sure we haven't even better sport here—

RENIE [coming to him] Sport? What sport? Can we join?

MATT That's just what I was going to propose There are four of you here, who heard Mr Pilcher's excellent discourse last night And you are all determined to turn over a new leaf this year Isn't that so?

DOLLY Yes!

HARRY I know I am

MATT Mrs Sturgess?

RENIE Yes, indeed!

MATT Lucas, you?

LUCAS Yes, Uncle

MATT On the first of January next, I am prepared to put a sovereign in this money-box for every one of you who can honestly declare that he has broken himself or herself of his bad habits during the year

LUCAS I say, not all our bad habits?

MATT H'm I don't wish to be exacting—I've no doubt each of you has his own little failing or weakness Well, come to me and say on your honor that you've conquered this or that pet special weakness—and in goes my sovereign

LUCAS You don't really mean it?

MATT Indeed I do I hope you won't stand out and—spoil sport, eh?

LUCAS Oh, I don't mind coming in—just for the lark of the thing

MATT Then you all agree?

DOLLY Oh yes

HARRY Certainly

MATT Mrs Sturgess?

RENIE We don't know where we may be next Christmas

DOLLY You'll be here with us I invite you on the spot You accept?

RENIE Yes, delighted, if my husband—

PROF Very pleased

MATT Well, Mr Pilcher, I think I've made your Blanket Club a very handsome offer

PILCHER Very handsome [Taking out watch] I hope our friends will cordially respond, for the sake of my poor parishioners

DOLLY You'll stay for a cup of tea?

PILCHER I've heaps of New Year's calls to make I'm afraid I must be going, good afternoon, Professor!

PROF Good afternoon

PILCHER Good afternoon, Telfer

HARRY Good afternoon

PILCHER Good-bye, Mrs Sturgess

RENIE Good-bye So many thanks for your eloquent sermon

PILCHER Now, was I eloquent? I suppose I was, since I've produced such an invigorating New Year atmosphere

[RENIE moves her French novel]

MATT And brought Lucas over from Aldershot in the snow!

LUCAS Rather! I shall come again next year

PILCHER Do And then we shall be able to estimate the effect of my eloquence

MATT [tapping the money-box] We shall!

PILCHER Good-bye, Mrs Telfer

DOLLY Good-bye [Rings bell]

PILCHER Good bye, Mr Barron

MATT Good-bye

PILCHER You might be inclined to risk a sovereign on yourself for the Blanket Club?

MATT I daren't I can't trust my gray matter— I should make a dreadful fiasco

PILCHER Mrs Telfer, I leave him in your hands *[Exit PILCHER]*

MATT Dolly, now that the parson's gone, I don't mind having that new Parisian hat on with you

DOLLY Done! I don't mind how much I punish you

PROF *[taking out his watch]* Half-past three, my dear

RENIE I don't think I'll go out this afternoon

PROF Oh, you'd better take your little constitutional You missed it yesterday I'm sure your restlessness is due to your not taking regular exercise

RENIE Which way are you going?

[Yawning]

PROF My usual round, up to the White House and back by the fish-pond

RENIE Perhaps I'll join you at the fish-pond

PROF *[to MATT]* Nothing like living by rule and measure

MATT I shouldn't wonder I've never tried it

PROF I ascribe my constant good health and contentment to my unvarying routine of work and diet and exercise

[Exit]

MATT Then where do my constant good health and contentment come from?

LUCAS Dolly, I left my evening kit here Could you put me up for the night?

DOLLY Delighted! You'll make up our rubber

LUCAS Right!

MATT Not going to ride back to Aldershot again to-night?

LUCAS Not to-night, thank you

MATT Just a shade too bracing, eh?

LUCAS Just a shade! Dolly, I haven't seen your new fish-pond Is anybody going to meet the Professor?

[Glancing at RENIE]

MATT I am *[Linking his arm in LUCAS'S]* We'll get into an unvarying routine of exercise for the next hour Come along!

[Takes LUCAS off as he is exchanging a look with RENIE RENIE makes to follow them, stops at door, turns back a little, stops, takes out LUCAS'S letter from her French novel, goes to fire and reads it Meanwhile the following

scene takes place between DOLLY and HARRY]

HARRY Now, Dolly, we can go through your bills *[Going to her writing-desk]*

DOLLY Yes Hadn't I better sort them out first?

HARRY *[taking up bills]* Oh, I'll help you sort them out—

DOLLY Take care! You'll muddle all my papers *[Taking bills out of his hands, and closing down the writing-desk]* I want to have a little talk with Renie—you'd better join them at the fish-pond

HARRY Well, so long as you do get them sorted, and squared up What about after tea?

DOLLY All right After tea

HARRY After tea We'll have a nice cosy half-hour and sweep them all out of our minds *[With a gesture Exit HARRY briskly She repeats his gesture]*

Sweep them all out of our minds *[Opening desk and regarding the bills with dismay]* Oh, don't I wish I could! Oh, Renie!

[RENIE is busy with her letter at the fire]

RENIE *[puts letter into pocket]* What is it?

DOLLY *[has taken up one or two bills]* These bills! These awful bills! These vampires!

RENIE Yes, dear! I suppose it's rather dreadful, but it must be sweet to have a dear kind husband who'll pay them all off

DOLLY Harry? He made a dreadful fuss last time And then I didn't show him all

RENIE Well, dear, after all, it's only bills—

DOLLY Only bills! Only? Well, I'm going to show him every one this time And what a lesson it shall be to me! That's why I'm so grateful to Mr Pilcher

RENIE Why?

DOLLY Yesterday afternoon I thought I'd screw up my courage to go through the bills just to see where I was My dear, I was paralyzed! I had the most appalling time! Well, Mr Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time I thought "what an idiot I must be to endure all this misery just for want of a little resolution"

RENIE Mr Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time for me, too

DOLLY Did it?

RENIE I had an awful afternoon yesterday!

DOLLY You? You haven't any bills?

RENIE No! *[Sighs]* I almost wish I had

DOLLY Wish you had?!

RENIE I almost envy you the delicious experience of having to confess——

DOLLY Yes, dear, you always were fond of scenes, but I'm not!

RENIE And then the heavenly feeling of being forgiven, and taken in the arms of the man you love!

DOLLY Yes, that part of it is all right. It's what comes before——

[*With a little shudder*]

RENIE After all, your husband isn't a machine. He is a human being!

DOLLY Oh, Harry's a perfect dear in most things, but he has got a temper!

RENIE My husband never even swears at me! Oh, Dolly, you are lucky!

DOLLY Hum!

RENIE Oh, Dolly——

[*Sighs and goes away*]

DOLLY Is anything the matter?

RENIE No dear. Nothing, except——oh, life is so hard! So hard!

DOLLY Renie, if you're in trouble——

RENIE Thank you, dear. I knew you'd help me.

DOLLY Yes, so long as it isn't money. And even then I'd help you, only I can't.

RENIE It isn't money. [*Looking at DOLLY curiously*] I wonder if you would understand.

DOLLY I'll do my best.

RENIE It's such a strange story. [*Moving away. DOLLY makes a little dubious grimace behind her back*] Dolly, I will trust you. You know I thoroughly admire and honor my husband?

DOLLY Yes. When you were engaged you called him "This great protagonist of science."

RENIE That was how he appeared to my foolish girl's imagination. But now——

DOLLY Now?

RENIE You know that, however tempted, nothing could induce me to wrong him for a moment.

DOLLY No, but is there anybody—Renie, who is it?

RENIE Give me your sacred promise you'll never breathe a word to any living soul?

DOLLY Not a word—who is it?

RENIE Not even to your husband?

DOLLY Not even to my husband. Who is it?

RENIE Well, dear, you know what my life has been. Few women have met with so little real sympathy as I. Few women have suffered——

DOLLY No, dear. Who is it? Do I know him?

RENIE Your cousin Lucas has a deep and sincere admiration for me.

DOLLY Lu! Of course! I might have known he'd never ride a dozen miles in the snow for a sermon! It's disgraceful of him!

RENIE No, dear, he's not to blame. We are neither of us to blame.

DOLLY [*contemptuously*] Oh! Why, you haven't known him a month, have you?

RENIE I met him for the first time in this room three weeks ago last Thursday afternoon.

DOLLY It's a great pity the Professor didn't come down with you.

RENIE That would have made no difference. It had to be!

DOLLY What had to be? Renie, how far has this gone? You've been meeting him alone——

RENIE Once or twice. But, however often I may have met him, he has offered me nothing but the most chivalrous attention. He has always respected me——

DOLLY Well, then, he mustn't respect you any more. It must be stopped.

RENIE Dolly, I didn't expect you to take up this attitude.

DOLLY You don't suppose I'm going to have this sort of thing in my own house, do you?

RENIE What sort of thing?

DOLLY Do you remember the awful row I got into at school when your boy's love letter was discovered in the Banbury cakes you'd persuaded me to take in for you?

RENIE But you received Banbury cakes of your own!

DOLLY Not since I've been married. Of course before your marriage your outrageous flirting didn't much matter——

RENIE Outrageous flirting?—If I seemed to flirt——

DOLLY Seemed?!

RENIE It was only in the vain hope of meeting with one who could offer me the perfect homage that I have always felt would one day be mine.

DOLLY Well, he mustn't offer it here! I shall tell him so very plainly. He'd better not stay to dinner.

RENIE There is no reason Captain Wentworth should not stay to dinner. He has given me the one absolutely blameless unselfish devotion of his life. I've accepted it on that distinct understanding. I've trusted you with my secret, a secret honorable alike to Captain Wentworth and myself. You've promised not to breathe a

word to any living soul You surely don't mean to break your word?

DOLLY I don't mean to stand the racket of your Banbury cakes

RENIE I didn't expect you to be so unsympathetic You promised to help me!

DOLLY Help you! How did you expect me to help you?

RENIE My husband has to go to Edinburgh next week to give a course of lectures there

DOLLY Well?

RENIE He wants me to go with him Dearest, it would be perfectly sweet of you to ask me to stay on another fortnight here

DOLLY I see!

RENIE There could be no possible harm in it now that you know our attachment is quite innocent and that you can look after me every moment Dearest, you might oblige me in a tiny little matter like this

DOLLY [after a pause] I'll think it over—

RENIE Thank you so much

DOLLY Renie, you said Mr Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time—

RENIE So it did

DOLLY You don't call this the "nick of time"?!

RENIE Yes, indeed I went to church in a perfect fever I didn't know what to do Well, as I listened to Mr Pilcher everything became quite clear to me I resolved I would accept Captain Wentworth's pure unselfish devotion and make it a lever to raise all my ideals and aspirations!

DOLLY But there wasn't anything in Mr Pilcher's sermon about—

RENIE Oh yes, there was a lot about ideals and aspirations

DOLLY Yes, but not the sort of aspirations you have for Lucas I suppose you know he makes love to every woman he comes across

RENIE He told me he had been led into one or two unworthy attachments

DOLLY Yes! That's quite right So he has! One or two!

RENIE That was before he met me

DOLLY Yes, and thus will be before he meets the next lady

RENIE My dear Dolly, with your light frivolous nature it is impossible for you to understand a pure and exalted attachment like ours Listen! [Taking out a letter] This will show you his fine nature, his fine feelings— "From the first moment I saw you —"

[MATT enters]

RENIE [putting letter in pocket] Well, have you had a pleasant walk?

MATT Very pleasant—and instructive The Professor asked me to remind you that he's waiting for you at the fish-pond

RENIE I'd better go I shall get a little lecture all to myself if I don't [Going off, to DOLLY] Thank you, dear, so much for your kind invitation 'o stay on!

DOLLY Don't mention it!

RENIE I shall try to manage it

[Exit]

DOLLY Yes, I'm sure you will

MATT Mrs Sturgess going to stay on?

DOLLY She wants me to invite her But I won't if I can help it [Goes to him suddenly] Dad!

MATT Well?

DOLLY That wretched Lucas!

MATT What about him?

DOLLY No, I've promised her not to breathe a word So you must guess [Pause] Have you guessed?

MATT [after a pause] Yes Well, I— [Begins to chuckle] So Lucas is up to his old games!

DOLLY My own guest! Under my own roof! It's too horrid of him

MATT [chuckling] It is! It's too bad! The rascal!

DOLLY Oh, it's more than half her fault! It's just like her What are you laughing at?

MATT I've just left— [Chuckling] I've just left the Professor down at the fish-pond explaining to Lucas all about his gray matter, and—

DOLLY I don't see anything to laugh at

MATT Twelve miles in the snow—I say, Doll, we're making a splendid start for the New Year! [Laughing]

DOLLY Dad! Will you please leave off? [Shaking his shoulder] Will you be serious?

MATT Yes, my dear! [Pulling himself together and straightening his features] Yes, I will After all, it's a serious matter

DOLLY It's very serious for me, in a neighborhood like this!

MATT It's serious for me, as I was Lucas's guardian And it's serious for him If he goes and plays the fool, it may spoil his career—the young ass!

DOLLY Very well, then, will you please treat it seriously and set to work and help me?

* MATT How far have matters gone?

DOLLY Oh, there's no real harm done at present

MATT How do you know?

DOLLY Oh, Lucas is writing her silly letters and she's talking about his pure and exalted devotion, and making it a lever to raise all her ideals and aspirations

MATT That looks bad! That looks very dangerous for her

DOLLY Oh, no, she knows how to take care of herself But it's dangerous for me!

MATT How, dangerous for you?!

DOLLY If there's the least bit of scandal she'll contrive to drag me into it! I know her so well

MATT [*walking about, cogitating*] Yes, and we mustn't let Lucas make a mess of it

DOLLY What can we do?

MATT When I was over at Aldershot last week Sir John said something about giving Lucas an ADC in India I'll drive over to-morrow and ask Sir John to pack Lucas out of the country for a year or two!

DOLLY That's a good idea But it may take some time?

MATT A week or so, perhaps more

DOLLY But if they find out they're going to be parted, it's just this next week when there will be all the danger

MATT That's true

DOLLY They ought to be parted to-night

MATT They ought! They ought! Not a doubt about it! Not a shadow of doubt! They ought to be parted to-night!

DOLLY Dad! I believe I can frighten Reme out of it

MATT Frighten her?

DOLLY I'll try! And you must take Lucas in hand——

MATT H'm! Isn't Harry the right person——?

DOLLY No, I sha'n't tell Harry Harry would only get into a temper and muddle it No, you must get Lucas to take himself off

MATT Take himself off!

DOLLY I won't have him here You can tell him so [*H'm*] Be very severe with him

MATT [*dubious*] H'm!

DOLLY Take a very high tone

MATT I'm not sure that taking a high tone is quite in my line

DOLLY Then please try it Dad, you do realize how very serious this is, don't you?

MATT Yes, of course Very well, I'll tackle Lucas We'll see what a high tone will do with him

DOLLY Hush!

[*LUCAS and HARRY enter LUCAS looks round for RENIE DOLLY and*

MATT talk in whispers as if settling a plan HARRY goes up to the collecting-box, takes out his knife and begins to scrape off the label]

DOLLY [*in a very severe tone to LUCAS, who is peeping into conservatory*] Are you looking for anything?

LUCAS I was wondering whether there was any tea going

DOLLY The tea is not in the conservatory

LUCAS No, but I thought it might be getting on to the time——

DOLLY The tea will be served in due course

LUCAS [*surprised at her tone*] Is anything the matter?

[*DOLLY looks at him severely, says nothing, turns to MATT LUCAS looks puzzled, goes away, and again looks furtively into conservatory for RENIE*]

HARRY [*scraping away at the collecting-box*] Don't forget, Doll—our cosy half hour after tea——

[*Nodding at the writing-desk*]

DOLLY I won't forget

MATT [*has come up behind HARRY, touches the arm he is scraping with*] Hospital for Incurables! I shouldn't scrape that off at present

CURTAIN

(*Four or five hours pass between Acts I and II*)

ACT II

SCENE—*The same, on the same evening, after dinner Enter RENIE, much distressed and agitated DOLLY follows quickly, closes the door cautiously and mysteriously*

RENIE But I don't understand Captam Wentworth and I have been so little together——

DOLLY Well, my dear, there it is! My father is the last man to pry into other people's affairs, but you see it has been forced upon his notice And from the tone he took——

RENIE What tone?

DOLLY He was very severe

RENIE [*alarmed*] But what did he say he had seen?

DOLLY He wouldn't go into particulars He seemed very much upset——

RENIE Upset?!

DOLLY Perhaps I ought to say shocked
RENIE Shocked?!

DOLLY And when my father is shocked
it must be something very glaring—

RENIE [*more and more alarmed*] But
there hasn't been anything glaring—

DOLLY Well, dear, of course, you
know

RENIE But I cannot imagine— [*Sud-
denly*] It must have been that day at the
stile!

DOLLY Perhaps What happened? No,
I don't wish to hear—

RENIE Captain Wentworth assisted me
over the stile—

DOLLY Well?—

RENIE That's all He may have taken
a little longer about it than was quite
necessary, and I may have leaned a little
heavier than the circumstances required
But it was all done in perfectly good taste

DOLLY [*shakes her head*] It can't have
been the stile

RENIE Then what—? [*Cudgels her
brains*] The dairy!

DOLLY Very likely Was that very—no,
don't tell me—

RENIE There's nothing to tell The
woman at the farm, Mrs —

DOLLY Biggs—

RENIE Biggs, asked me to go over her
model dairy

DOLLY Did she ask Lucas?

RENIE He came Mrs Biggs insisted
on our tasting her mince pies—

DOLLY Mince pies— Yes?

RENIE While she went to get one—

DOLLY Get one—

RENIE She wasn't out of the dairy
ten seconds—

DOLLY No—and then?

RENIE Captain Wentworth—a —

DOLLY Respected you!

RENIE [*firing up*] He is always most
respectful! In the most delicate, exquisitely
chivalrous way, he implored me for one
first and only kiss, and just as I was re-
fusing him, somebody passed the dairy
windows—

DOLLY My father often strolls that
way—

RENIE But I was quite cold and cor-
rect— [*Very anxiously*] Dolly, tell me ex-
actly what Mr Barron said?

DOLLY At first he was going to speak
to you himself, but I said, "No, that's my
duty! I'm her oldest friend, I'll talk to
her!"

RENIE Ye—es?

DOLLY So, at last he consented, and
said "Very well Be very firm with her,

because this sort of thing taking place
under my very nose and under my daugh-
ter's roof is what I cannot, and will not,
tolerate for one moment!"

RENIE He must have passed the dairy
windows!

DOLLY Yes

RENIE And jumped to a wrong con-
clusion

DOLLY Yes And that isn't the
worst—

RENIE [*freshly alarmed*] Not the
worst?!

DOLLY Now, don't be alarmed,
dear—

RENIE About what?

DOLLY Didn't you notice something
strange in your husband's manner at din-
ner?

RENIE No What makes you
think—?

DOLLY My dear, if my father not ced
it, why not your husband? Suppose all this
time the Professor has been quietly,
stealthily watching you and Lucas

RENIE [*alarmed*] Dolly!

DOLLY And waiting his time—

RENIE Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY Didn't you notice how he in-
sisted on your going to the fish-pond?

RENIE Yes, he did!

DOLLY Didn't it strike you there was
something in that?

RENIE No, and he hasn't said any-
thing—

DOLLY Of course not Naturally he
would hide his suspicions from you till the
right moment

RENIE Right moment?

DOLLY Now, dear, you see how serious
things are You mustn't run any more risks
This must be broken off to-night

RENIE To-night?!

DOLLY Now, what can I do to help
you?

RENIE You might tell Mr Barron
there was nothing in the dairy windows

DOLLY Of course I'll tell him, but if
he saw—

RENIE But there was nothing Abso-
lutely nothing—

DOLLY No, dear What else can I do?

RENIE Could you find out exactly how
much he has seen and heard, and—a—
pump him a little?

DOLLY I don't like pumping people—
still— What else?

RENIE [*breaking down*] Oh, Dolly,
this blow could not have fallen at a more
cruel moment

DOLLY No, dear

RENIE It came just when I had lost all the illusions of girlhood, when all my woman's nature began to cry out——

DOLLY Yes— [*Listens*] Hush!

[*Creeps up to door, listens, opens it, looks out, closes it again*]

RENIE What was it?

DOLLY Hush! Voices! I thought it might be Lucas and the Professor quarreling

RENIE I really don't think my husband suspects——

DOLLY No, I daresay it's only my imagination

RENIE And if he did— Dolly, is there one man living, except my husband, who would condemn me for being the object of a noble, single-hearted devotion like Captain Wentworth's?

DOLLY No, dear, perhaps not. But, you see, as husbands they take quite a different view of things from what they do merely as men

RENIE Tell me candidly, Dolly, you see nothing wrong in it, do you?

DOLLY Well, dear, when you say wrong——

RENIE But I assure you there isn't—nothing could be farther from my thoughts

DOLLY No, dear—still, people are so full of prejudice—now what can I do?

RENIE Oh, Dolly, you can help me so much

DOLLY [*a little alarmed*] Can I? Tell me——

RENIE If Lucas and I am parted— [*Breaks down*] I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

DOLLY Try, dear! Try!

RENIE [*sobbing*] I will. And if at any time I long to hear how he bears our separation, you won't mind receiving a letter, and sending it on to me?

DOLLY I'm afraid I couldn't do that, dear. You see, I'm so careless, and if I left the letter about, and Harry found it—no, dear——

RENIE You won't help me?

DOLLY Yes, dear, I'll do anything in my power! [*Suddenly*] I'll tell you what I can do!

RENIE Yes?

DOLLY My father is telling Lucas he must leave to-night. Well, I can spare you all the pain and misery of saying "Good-bye," and take one last message to him

RENIE [*curtly*] No, thank you. It's most unkind of you to send him away like this. I must see him alone before he goes

DOLLY [*shaking her head*] My father

insists, and suppose Lucas feels that he owes it to your reputation to go quietly——

RENIE Without seeing me?!

DOLLY And suppose the Professor is really watching you——

[*RENIE shows great perplexity DOLLY is watching her*]

DOLLY If you don't see Lucas, what message shall I take him?

RENIE Tell him how proud I am of his noble, unselfish devotion, tell him I shall always look upon it as the one supreme happiness of my life to have known him—tell him that——

[*The PROFESSOR and MATTHEW enter. The PROFESSOR has diagrams and illustrations in his hand. Following the PROFESSOR and MATT are HARRY and LUCAS. LUCAS, after a little time, comes up to DOLLY and RENIE, who are seated on sofa. The PROFESSOR is speaking to MATT as he enters, and is showing him an illustration.*]

PROF [*in his hard, metallic voice*] Observe that woman's facial angle—[*pointing*]—the peculiar curve of the lip, and the irregular formation of the nose

MATT I have seen sweeter things in ladies' lips and noses

PROF Can you be surprised at her history?

MATT Who was she?

PROF Jane Sweetman, the notorious trigamist. Looking at that woman's cranium I maintain it was impossible for her to avoid——

MATT Committing trigamy?

PROF Well, some species of grave moral delinquency

[*DOLLY clutches RENIE'S wrist significantly. The PROFESSOR hands the illustration to HARRY, who examines it. MATT moves away a step and unobtrusively feels his own nose and forehead.*]

HARRY [*has examined the illustration*]

By Jove, yes—anybody can see she was bound to come a moral cropper, eh?

[*He hands the illustration to DOLLY, who passes it to RENIE, with a very significant glance, pointing out something on the paper. LUCAS leans over the back of the sofa between RENIE and DOLLY to look at the illustration. As he leans on the back of the sofa, DOLLY draws herself up very indignantly, gives him a severe look, moves a little away from him, sits and looks very severely in front of her. He*

cannot understand her attitude, draws back a little and looks puzzled]

PROF [bringing out another illustration, offering it to MATT] Now look at this

MATT Somebody's brains!

PROF Tell me if you notice anything peculiar

[HARRY leans over MATT'S shoulder, and looks at the illustration LUCAS again leans over the sofa, between DOLLY and RENIE DOLLY again moves a little farther away from him with another indignant look LUCAS is again puzzled, but bends and looks over the illustration in RENIE'S hands]

LUCAS So that's Jane Sweetman! Well, if Jane was bound to come a moral cropper, I'm very glad I wasn't bound to come a moral cropper with Jane, eh, Dolly?

[Very pleasantly]

DOLLY [very severely] I should scarcely have thought you troubled whom you came a moral cropper with!

[Looks at him severely, goes up to writing-desk, seats herself and writes letter He feels himself snubbed, and moves a step or two back, stands and looks puzzled PROFESSOR has been critically regarding MATT and HARRY, who have been looking at the illustration]

PROF Well, does anything strike you?

MATT No [Holding it out] Looks rather pulpy—rather—a—squashy—

PROF Exactly! Observe the soft, almost watery condition of that gray matter What is the inevitable consequence?

MATT I couldn't quite say—whom did that gray matter belong to?

PROF Harriet Poy

MATT I don't remember Harriet—

PROF The Pyromaniac At the age of four set fire to her mother's bed At twelve was found saturating blankets with petroleum, at sixteen fired three haystacks, for which she was sentenced to six months' imprisonment

MATT Poor Harriet! But of course if her gray matter went and got watery—

PROF Just so! I maintain that with her gray matter in that condition it was a stupid crime to send her to prison

DOLLY But what are we to do with people whose gray matter goes wrong?

PROF I propose to deal with that question at Edinburgh [To MATT] You might, perhaps, care to run down to Edinburgh for my lectures—

MATT I should love it above all things,

but the fact is, I'm so thoroughly of your opinion—

PROF Are you? I'm delighted I've convinced you

MATT Completely All my life I've been doing things I should never have dreamed of doing if my gray matter had done its duty and not got watery

HARRY Yes, when you come to think of all the rotten things you find yourself doing, you feel, by Jove—

[Suddenly recalls that he has said "by Jove," pulls sixpence out of his pocket and drops it in the box]

MATT Bravo, Harry! [Patting him]

HARRY Oh, I mean it!—Professor, isn't it time for our hundred up?

PROF [taking out his watch] In two minutes

HARRY I'll go and get the table ready [Going up to door] Doll—[taps the writing-desk]—you put it off after tea—by-and-by, you know!

DOLLY [she has finished letter, has risen, and closed writing-desk] By-and-by

HARRY Before we go to bed—don't forget

DOLLY Oh, I sha'n't forget

[Makes a wry face Exit HARRY]

PROF Rennie, you were complaining of headache It would be wise to take a short stroll in the cool air

RENIE Oh, very well

PROF Wrap up thoroughly Ten minutes, not longer

[Exit DOLLY, unseen by RENIE and LUCAS, slips the note she has been writing into MATT'S hands He takes it down stage right, and reads it RENIE and LUCAS have been talking, apart, they move towards the door to get out, but DOLLY is standing in the way of their exit]

DOLLY Oh, Rennie! I'll put on my things, and come with you

RENIE But Captain Wentworth has offered—

DOLLY I've a splitting headache—I must get a little air And Dad wants to have a talk with Lucas, don't you?

MATT If he can spare five minutes

LUCAS Won't by-and-by be just as convenient?

DOLLY [facing LUCAS, speaking firmly] No, by-and-by will not be just as convenient Now, Rennie, we'll leave them together

LUCAS I say, Doll, what's up? [Folds her off] What's the matter?

MATT [reading DOLLY'S note] "Be very severe with him Make a great point

of the dairy windows He'll understand " Dairy windows?

[*Puts the note in his pocket, as LUCAS re-enters, puzzled and disappointed*]

LUCAS I can't think what's the matter with Dolly She has done nothing but snub me all evening

MATT [*looking at him sternly*] So I should imagine!

LUCAS [*startled by his manner*] I say, have I done anything?

MATT Done anything! I'm a man of the world! Nobody can accuse me of being strait-laced, and therefore I suppose you think you can come here and set at defiance all the—it's disgraceful!

LUCAS Would you mind telling me what you're hinting at?

MATT I'm not hinting! I'm going to speak out very plainly, and I tell you that I look upon your conduct as something—something atrocious!

LUCAS I say, Uncle, what's all this about?

MATT What's it about? What's it about? It's about the dairy windows!

LUCAS Then it was you—phew!—so it was you?

MATT Well, after the dairy windows, can you stand there and tell me you aren't thoroughly, completely, heartily ashamed of yourself?

LUCAS Well, I suppose I am But, after all, it wasn't so very bad —

MATT Not bad?!

LUCAS Well, not so damned awful

MATT [*regards him for a few moments*] Well, I'm astonished! If you don't consider your behavior damned awful, will you please find me some word that will describe it?

LUCAS You know you're putting a much worse construction on this than the necessities of the case demand

MATT What?!

LUCAS I've nothing to reproach myself with Mrs Biggs wasn't out of the dairy three minutes, and you were hanging about the windows all the time

MATT I was hanging about the windows?

LUCAS Yes, and I must say that when you saw two people engaged in an interesting conversation the least you could do was to pass on and take no notice

MATT "Interesting conversation"?!

LUCAS Well, what did you call it? If it comes to that, what do you accuse me of?

MATT Well, here you are, on the first day of the year, after listening to a most

eloquent sermon, after making a solemn resolution to give up all your bad habits —

LUCAS Excuse me, I expressly stated that I didn't mean to give up *all* my bad habits And I don't call this a bad habit

MATT You don't call making love to a married woman a bad habit?!

LUCAS Of course in one sense it is a bad habit But it isn't a bad habit in the sense that other bad habits are bad habits Look at all the decent chaps who've been led into it!

MATT That doesn't excuse you And if you think that I'm going to countenance your conduct, you are very much mistaken in your estimate of my character

LUCAS [*very quietly*] May I ask you one simple question?

MATT Well?

LUCAS When you were my age, if you found yourself alone in a dairy with a good-looking woman, and she was good for a dozen kisses or so, wouldn't you have taken advantage of it?

MATT No—no —

LUCAS Well, what would you have done?

MATT I should have summoned all my resolution —

LUCAS Oh, that be hanged! Come, Uncle, no humbug! Man to man!

MATT Well, I don't say that at your age I might not have been tempted—and of course we must all go through a certain amount of experience, or how should we be able to advise you youngsters?

LUCAS I say, no confounded nonsense —your uncle Archie —

MATT Dear old chap!

LUCAS What use did you make of his advice?

MATT Well, I remember his talking to me very seriously—I suppose I was about your age—did I ever tell you, Lucas [*taking LUCAS'S arm affectionately*] about a very remarkable auburn-haired girl, Madge Seaforth?

LUCAS No

MATT And my racing her across Salisbury Plain at night?

LUCAS No

MATT Forty-eight miles one glorious May night! I let her beat me! God bless her! I let her beat me! And just as the sun rose we caught sight of Salisbury spire

LUCAS Sounds rather jolly!

MATT Jolly? Jolly? It was romance! It was poetry! Ah! Lu, my boy, you may say what you like, there's nothing like it

on this side heaven I told you about Mrs—never mind her name—dressing up as a widow

LUCAS No?

MATT Well, I bet the little hussy a fiver—I can see her face, as she stepped out of the cupboard Come, come, Lucas! This won't do! This will never do! Now to get back to this business of yours—

LUCAS Well—

MATT When I was your guardian I let you have a pretty good fling?

LUCAS You did!

MATT The pace was rather scorching, wasn't it?

LUCAS Rather!

MATT I never pulled you up, did I?

LUCAS No, and I'm grateful

MATT That's all right Now, old chap, you've got to pull up!

LUCAS Pull up?

MATT Short This Mrs Sturgess—Dolly says there's a lot of nonsense going on, gushing letters and so on—damned silly thing writing letters, Lu—

LUCAS Yes, I know

MATT Well, what do you do it for?

LUCAS I don't know

MATT You're seeing her every day If you must carry on this tomfoolery, why not do it by word of mouth? Why write it down, to show what an ass you've been?

LUCAS I'm sure I don't know

MATT Do you know why you're carrying on with her at all?

LUCAS Well, she's a good-looking woman, and naturally a chap—naturally—

MATT You're either in love with her, or you aren't?

LUCAS I can't say I'm exactly in love with her—

MATT Then why are you making love to her?

LUCAS Well, naturally a chap—naturally—I don't know that I ain't a bit in love with her

MATT Well, it doesn't much matter If you aren't in love with her you're a fool to risk a scandal If you are in love you'll most likely do some silly jackass thing that will knock your career on the head, eh?

LUCAS Well, when you look at it that way—

MATT Look at it that way! Anyhow, she's a married woman, and you're here as a guest—it isn't the right thing to do, is it?

LUCAS No, it isn't

MATT Very well, then, don't do it Don't do it! Cut it! You will?

LUCAS I've got to, I suppose

MATT Yes, you've got to You can tell Doll I gave it to you hot and strong, and you're going to clear out, and not see Mrs Sturgess again—

LUCAS Not see her again?

MATT Isn't that what you mean to do?

LUCAS Yes, I suppose I say, what did you see at the dairy windows?

MATT I didn't see anything at all!

LUCAS Nothing at all?

MATT I wasn't there!

LUCAS Then how—?

MATT Dolly put me up to it

[Laughs at him]

LUCAS Dolly?

[DOLLY enters with a cloak which she throws on chair]

MATT Ah, Doll—

DOLLY [looking severely at LUCAS] Have you spoken to him?

MATT Yes, very seriously, extra seriously, and he's going to do the right thing and clear out, aren't you, Lucas?

LUCAS [a little unwillingly] Yes

MATT Good chap! Good chap!

DOLLY [still a little severe] I'm pleased to hear it [To LUCAS] You've behaved in the most scandalous—

MATT He has I've told him all that And he sees it quite plainly, don't you?

DOLLY Then it's quite broken off?

MATT Quite! Isn't it, Lu?

LUCAS Yes, I suppose I should like to say—

DOLLY Yes?

LUCAS That nothing has taken place which, if rightly looked at, could reflect discredit either upon the lady, or, I hope, upon myself And secondly, whatever fault there may have been, is entirely mine

MATT That's satisfactory! It always ought to be the man's fault Heaven forbid it should ever be theirs Dolly, he's behaving splendidly Now, Lu, good night!

[DOLLY rings bell]

LUCAS [surprised] Good night?!

DOLLY Good night, and good-bye!

[Holding out her hand]

LUCAS You aren't going to turn me out to-night!

DOLLY You said it was quite broken off

LUCAS Yes, but—[turns to MATT with appealing gesture]—Uncle, you didn't mean to pack me off like this—

MATT Yes, my boy! Remember the occasion First day of the New Year Take time by the forelock Off you go!

[*Taking him by the shoulder and trying to get him off*]

LUCAS [*resisting*] Oh no! I don't see it in that light at all

[*Sinks comfortably into armchair*]

[*CRIDDLE appears at door*]

DOLLY Criddle, please have Captain Wentworth's portmanteau taken to the billiard-room

CRIDDLE Yes, ma'am

DOLLY He wishes to change there, and please send to the Red Lion and ask them to have Captain Wentworth's horse saddled

CRIDDLE Yes, ma'am

LUCAS Criddle, what's the weather like?

CRIDDLE It's a bit colder, sir Looks as if we were going to have another heavy fall of snow

LUCAS I don't think I'll go to-night, Criddle If I want the gee saddled, I'll go and tell them myself

CRIDDLE Yes, sir [*Exit*]

LUCAS [*in armchair*] I say, Dolly, you don't really expect me to go careering over that heath at this ungodly hour?

DOLLY You can't stay here Renie is very much upset, she has had hysterics So I've put her in the spare room

LUCAS Well, you can give me a shake-down somewhere—in the billiard-room

DOLLY [*shakes her head*] I can't ask the servants to make up impossible beds in impossible places at this hour

LUCAS I call this beastly unfair of you, Dolly

DOLLY Unfair?

LUCAS Just as I'd summoned up all my resolution to do the right thing, and avoid ructions for your sake, you pounce down on me, and order me off the premises, and —

DOLLY [*getting angry*] If you don't behave yourself and go off quietly, I shall have 'o order you off the premises

[*Makes an appeal by gesture to MATT to get him off*]

MATT Now, my hero! [*Lifting him out of the armchair*] Buckle on your armor! Sally forth! Once more unto the breach!

[*With some difficulty he raises LUCAS out of the chair*]

LUCAS Well, I'll go and have a look at the weather [*Goes sulkily up to door*] Mind you, if you turn me out I won't be responsible if there's a flare-up —

DOLLY Very well, so long as we don't have a flare-up here Oh!

[*Rings the bell again Exit LUCAS*]

DOLLY It would serve them both right if there was to be a flare-up—only I'm sure she'd drag me into it somehow [*CRIDDLE appears at door*] Please send and ask them at the Red Lion to saddle Captain Wentworth's horse and send it here at once

CRIDDLE Yes, ma'am [*Exit*]

DOLLY Lucas is going to behave as badly over this as he did over the govern-
erness, Dad —!

MATT Well?

DOLLY Of course, Lucas is in the army, but surely he—he isn't a fair sample?

MATT Oh no, oh no! Lucas is very exceptional—quite exceptional

DOLLY I thought so! They can't all be —

MATT Oh no! I'm glad to say —

DOLLY I'm determined he shall go to-night [*LUCAS re-enters*]

LUCAS I say, Dolly, I wish you'd come and look at the weather

DOLLY What for?

LUCAS There's a great black cloud—it's going to come down!

DOLLY I don't care if the heavens come down! You're going back to Alder-shot to-night

LUCAS But I tell you—[*Appeals to MATT*] It's simply impossib^c for me to ride across that heath —

MATT But you rode across it last night in a howling snowstorm —

LUCAS Yes, I did! Last night! And never again, thank you! No! I don't mind shaking down anywhere to oblige —

[*He is about to drop again into the armchair, but MATT gently pushes him aside and drops into the chair himself*]

LUCAS Anywhere to oblige!

[*Drops comfortably on to the sofa*]

DOLLY Lucas, this is abominable! I suppose you think because we treated you so leniently over that wretched govern-
ness —

LUCAS Well, I thought you were pretty deuced hard down on us —

DOLLY What? Oh!

[*Appeals to MATT*]

LUCAS I didn't mind your slanging me, but you might have had a little consid-
eration for her feelings, because, after all, she was one of your own sex!

DOLLY My own sex! The minx!

LUCAS And an orphan!

DOLLY Orphan! [*To MATT*] Go and speak to him! Go and speak to him!

MATT Come, Lu You're not playin'

the game! You promised to take yourself off

LUCAS [*comfortably seated*] Well, I will take myself off, only let me take myself off in my own way

DOLLY It's useless your staying! Renie won't see you again

LUCAS Won't she?

DOLLY No She gave me a last message for you—

LUCAS Did she? Why didn't you give it to me?

DOLLY If I tell you, will you take yourself off?

LUCAS Yes, of course What was her last message?

DOLLY She said, "She should always value your noble devotion, and be proud that she had known you, but you must see how hopeless it was, and that she trusted you would go away at once and leave her to respect you, as you had always respected her!"

MATT A very pretty, touching little adieu! Does her great credit Now, Lu! Cut it! Come, my boy!

[*Lifts him up off sofa* LUCAS gets up *very reluctantly*]

LUCAS Well, if I must go—good night!

MATT Good night [*Shaking hands*] I may see you to-morrow afternoon

LUCAS Where?

MATT I'm driving over to Aldershot to see Sir John I shall look you up—

LUCAS I may not be there in the afternoon—

DOLLY Lucas, you're coming over here—

LUCAS No—no, I'm not You shouldn't suspect me like that

DOLLY It won't be the least use your coming—

LUCAS I know that Well, good-bye, Doll—

DOLLY Good-bye [*Shaking hands*]

LUCAS [*is going up to door slowly and reluctantly, turns*] I suppose if I were to give you my solemn promise I wouldn't see her, I couldn't shake down on that sofa

DOLLY [*sternly and decisively*] No!

LUCAS [*goes a few more steps towards door, turns*] I suppose I couldn't see Mrs Sturgess? [*DOLLY looks indignant*] Only to say good-bye

DOLLY No! She was nearly undressed when I left her She's asleep by now!

[*Enter RENIE fully dressed, looking very interesting and tearful Through-*

out the scene she preserves the air of a martyr]

DOLLY [*indignantly*] Renie, you promised me you wouldn't come downstairs again!

RENIE Yes, dear, but I felt I couldn't rest under your father's unjust suspicions [*Goes to MATT, seizes his hand sympathetically*] Dolly tells me you have been watching the friendship that all unconsciously has sprung up between Captain Wentworth and myself—

MATT [*uncomfortable*] Not exactly watching—

RENIE I feel you may have seen, or guessed something, that has given you a wrong impression

MATT No, no! I assure you—

RENIE If you have, I beg you to speak out and give us a chance of defending ourselves Tell us exactly what you have seen, and what you suspect—

MATT My dear Mrs Sturgess, I haven't seen anything, and I don't suspect any thing

RENIE You really mean that?

MATT Yes—yes—

RENIE [*claspings his hand eagerly*] Thank you so much Friendship between a man and a woman is so misunderstood

MATT It is

DOLLY Yes, Lucas had a friendship with a governess here which we all misunderstood—till afterwards

LUCAS I say, Dolly, don't you—

RENIE Now that there is no chance of your misjudging our friendship, I don't mind saying— [*Shows signs of breaking down*] You won't misunderstand me?

[*Clinging to his hand*]

MATT No, no!

RENIE My life has not been altogether a happy one

MATT I'm sure it hasn't!

RENIE Under other circumstances—let that pass! [*Wrings MATT's hands*] Thank you, thank you! Captain Wentworth, I shall always be proud to have known you

DOLLY I've told him all that!

[*MATT hushes DOLLY with a gesture*]

RENIE I shall always cherish the memory of our friendship, but it might be misunderstood, and so [*breaking down, but bearing up with an effort*], you will behave like the gallant gentleman I know you to be, and say good-bye to me forever!

MATT Nobly spoken! Very nobly spoken indeed!

LUCAS Well, if you insist—

RENIE I do! Good-bye forever!

LUCAS Good-bye

[*They have a long hand-shake*]

RENIE Good-bye

[*Tears herself away from him and tragically throws herself on sofa LUCAS follows her up*]

LUCAS I say, Mrs Sturgess—

RENIE [*moans*] Go, go! In pity's name don't make it harder for me!

MATT In pity's name don't make it harder for her

DOLLY [*looking off at door*] They'll be coming out of the billiard-room directly

MATT Now, Lucas—

[*CRIDDLE appears at door*]

CRIDDLE Your horse is waiting for you, sir

LUCAS My horse?!

CRIDDLE Yes, sir, just outside

LUCAS What on earth do they mean? A valuable horse like that—standing about on a night like this—who told them?

DOLLY I did The horse is waiting to take you back to Aldershot

LUCAS I can't go back to Aldershot in this kit [*Pointing to his dress-clothes*]

Te'l them to take it back to the Red Lion!

DOLLY And Criddle, give the man Captain Wentworth's portmanteau to take to the Red Lion at the same time, and send Peters to me at once

CRIDDLE Yes, ma'am [*Exit*]

LUCAS Well, of all—Good-bye, Mrs Sturgess

DOLLY You've said good-bye—

RENIE [*still tragic on sofa*] Farewell—forever!

LUCAS Good night, Dolly!

DOLLY Farewell—for a good long time

LUCAS Good night, Uncle

MATT Good night, Lucas

LUCAS [*turns at door*] Happen to have your cigar-case handy?

[*MATT takes out cigar-case, offers it*]

LUCAS Could you spare two?

MATT Certainly!

LUCAS I've got a jolly long ride, I'll take three if you don't mind

MATT Do!

LUCAS Thank'ee Well, good night, everybody

[*MATT gets LUCAS off, closes door after him*]

RENIE [*rouses herself from sofa*] Has he gone? Is it all over?

DOLLY I hope so

RENIE [*goes to MATT impulsively—*

and seizes his hand] At least this bitter experience has gained me one true friend

MATT [*embarrassed*] Yes—

RENIE [*wrings his hand in gratitude*] Thank you so much—

[*He gets away from her and shows relief, takes out cigar and prepares to light it*]

RENIE [*standing in the middle of the room pitying herself*] That's where we get the worst of it, we women who have hearts! We must feel, we must show our feelings, and then we get trampled down in the fight Oh, Dolly, how I envy you your nature!

DOLLY [*very chilly*] Are you going into the spare room, dear?

RENIE Anywhere! Anywhere! Yes, the spare room!

[*PETERS appears at door*]

DOLLY Peters, will you bank up the fire in the spare room and make everything comfortable for Mrs Sturgess?

PETERS Yes, ma'am [*Exit*]

RENIE [*still in the middle of the room, pitying herself*] So my poor little tragedy is ended!

MATT Yes Well, let's be thankful no bones are broken!

RENIE No bones, but how about hearts? Well, I must bear it [*With a weary smile*] Mustn't I?

MATT I'm afraid you must

RENIE Good night! [*Wrings his hand with gratitude*] Good night!

MATT Good night

[*Gets away from her, and busies himself with his cigar, lights it*]

RENIE Good night, Dolly!

DOLLY I'll come up with you, and stay till you're quite comfortable

RENIE Shall I ever be comfortable again? Will things ever be the same? I wonder!

[*Goes off mournfully and tragically*]

MATT [*creeps up and closes door*]

DOLLY I know she'll be here next Christmas! [*Marches down enraged to MATT and repeats in an angry, aggrieved way, emphasizing each word*] I know that woman will be here next Christmas!

MATT [*seats comfortably with his cigar and paper*] I daresay she will—

[*DOLLY marches indignantly and decisively to door and exits*]

CURTAIN

(Half an hour passes between Acts II and III)

ACT III

SCENE—*The same Discover MATT in the same seat and attitude, with paper and cigar DOLLY enters*

MATT Well?

DOLLY I've had an awful time with her—

MATT How?

DOLLY First she had another fit of hysterics—then she longed to go out into the night air to cool her fevered brow—then she moaned out something about her noble Lucas—

MATT And now?

DOLLY I've persuaded her to let Peters undress her I've got her off my hands at last

MATT That's a comfort

DOLLY Dad!

MATT Yes

DOLLY I won't have her here next Christmas

MATT No, I wouldn't

DOLLY [*repeats in a slow, aggrieved, enraged way, emphasizing each syllable*] Whatever happens, I will not have that woman in my house next Christmas You hear that?

MATT Yes You won't have her here next Christmas!

DOLLY I mean it, this time And I won't have Lucas here again for a very long time

MATT I wouldn't

DOLLY Dad, please put away that paper You're going over to Aldershot tomorrow to try to get Lucas exchanged?

MATT I'll try

[*PETERS appears at door*]
DOLLY Well, Peters, have you made Mrs Sturgess comfortable?

PETERS I'm trying to, ma'am

DOLLY Is she in bed yet?

PETERS No, ma'am

DOLLY Not in bed!

PETERS No, ma'am, but she seems rather quieter

DOLLY She let you undress her, I suppose?

PETERS I'm just going to, ma'am She says her brain is still throbbing

DOLLY Throbbing!

PETERS And could you lend her your hop-pillow?

DOLLY You'll find it in my wardrobe

PETERS Yes, ma'am

DOLLY Peters, pat up the hop-pillow for her, and insist on undressing her—

PETERS Yes, ma'am

DOLLY Don't leave her till you've seen her comfortably in bed

PETERS No, ma'am

[*Exit A gust of wind and a little rattle of hail on the conservatory window*]

MATT Whew! The New Year means business!

DOLLY And so do I, as Lucas will find out

MATT He is finding it out, on that heath!

DOLLY Yes! [*With a little laugh A louder gust and rattle of hail*] Listen! Ha! And he might have been here playing a comfortable rubber by the fire—if he'd simply behaved himself!

MATT If he'd "simply behaved" himself! What we all miss through not "simply behaving" ourselves [*Another gust*]

DOLLY Ah! He's catching it! I shall insist on Renie driving out with me tomorrow afternoon

MATT Yes

DOLLY Then she can't meet Lucas That will be another sell for him—[*Another furious gust and rattle*] Listen! Ha! ha! I wonder how far Lucas has got!

[*A noise of something being knocked over in the conservatory, which is lighted*]

MATT [*goes to the conservatory door, looks in, is startled*] Hillo! hillo!

[*LUCAS enters from the upper conservatory door in riding-clothes of first Act*]

DOLLY Lucas! How dare you?

LUCAS It's all right—don't make a fuss!

DOLLY [*furious*] Why aren't you on the way to Aldershot?

LUCAS I didn't like the look of the weather! I didn't like the look of it one little bit! So I got them to give me a shake-down at the Red Lion—

DOLLY Shake-down at the Red Lion!

LUCAS Yes, on their sofa! You needn't look so black! I asked you first, to let me have a shake-down here—on that sofa—

DOLLY But why have you come back here?

LUCAS Well, I must have dropped those cigars Uncle Matt gave me I put them carefully in my side pocket, and when I got down to the Red Lion, lo and behold, they weren't there!

DOLLY You could have got a cigar at the Red Lion—

LUCAS [*turns to MATT for sympathy*] I could have got a cigar at the Red Lion! [*To DOLLY*] No thank you! So I

thought I'd just stroll up here in the hope——

DOLLY In the hope of seeing Mrs Sturgess! But she's safely in bed this time, and there's no possible chance of your seeing her

LUCAS In the hope of getting Harry to give me a decent smoke Well, I came into the Hall and not wishing to rile you by my hated presence—I slipped into the conservatory——

[Enter HARRY]

HARRY [surprised at the riding-clothes] Hillo, Lu, going back to Alder-shot to-night?

LUCAS No, not unless the weather takes a turn No, Dolly said that as the spare room was occupied, would I mind getting a shake-down at the Red Lion So I did, and as I've got nothing to smoke, may I cadge a cigar?

HARRY Yes, old fellow

[Taking out cigar-case]

DOLLY [intercepting] You said I should take charge of your cigars, in case you should be tempted to smoke more than two a day——

HARRY By Jove, I forgot all about two a day—I've been smoking all day Here, Lu! [About to throw cigar-case to LUCAS] You'd better take the lot and keep me out of temptation!

DOLLY No! I'll take charge of that, please

[Takes the cigar-case, goes to writing-desk, puts it in PETERS appears at door]

PETERS Beg pardon, ma'am, Mrs Sturgess——

DOLLY What about her?

PETERS When I got back with the hop-pillow she wasn't there I've looked all over the house, and I can't find her anywhere

[RENIE enters, fully dressed from conservatory, very languidly, with handkerchief and smelling-salts PETERS goes off]

DOLLY Renie!

[Looks at MATT, who is inclined to laugh, checks it, shrugs his shoulders and goes over to fire]

RENIE My head was racking, I had to rush out—I've been pacing up and down under the veranda, up and down, up and down, up and down—[DOLLY makes a little grimace of angry incredulity] It's a little easier now, so I'll take advantage of the lull, and try to get some sleep

DOLLY Yes, I would

RENIE Good night, dear

DOLLY [severely] Good night once more

RENIE Good night, Mr Telfer

[Offering hand]

HARRY Good night, I'm awfully sorry——

RENIE [with her weary smile] Oh, it's only a headache I can bear it Thank you for your sympathy Good night, Mr Barron

MATT Good night I hope we sha'n't have any more little tragedies, eh?

RENIE I hope not, oh, I hope not! [To LUCAS, very casually and distantly] Good night, Captain Wentworth

LUCAS Good night, Mrs Sturgess

[Exit RENIE PETERS is seen to join her in the hall A little pause]

LUCAS Well, I'll be toddling back to the Red Lion Good night, Dolly Good night, Harry

HARRY Good night, Lu Seems a pity for you to turn out on a night like this Dolly, can't we give him a shake-down——?

DOLLY No!

[HARRY shows surprise at her tone A little pause of embarrassment]

LUCAS Good night, Uncle Matt

MATT [comes up to him, in a low voice] Cut it, my dear lad Cut it! That's understood?

LUCAS Yes, of course Well, good night, Dolly, once more [She doesn't reply] Oh well, if you're going on the rampage—[Goes off muttering] Infernal nuisance—night like this—— [Exit]

HARRY Is anything the matter?

DOLLY Lucas has offended me very much I don't wish to speak of it

[The PROFESSOR enters at back]

MATT Well, who was the victor?

HARRY The Professor won all four games

PROF I ascribe the increased accuracy of my stroke at billiards to my increased nerve force, now I have made Pableine my staple article of diet in place of meat

MATT Flies to the gray matter, eh?

PROF Instantaneously

MATT Good stuff!

PROF I hope you'll try it Shall I send a tin to your room?

MATT Will you? That will be kind!

[CRIDDLE appears at door]

CRIDDLE I've put the spirits in the hall, sir

HARRY You can take them away, Criddle In the future we sha'n't require spirits at night, only soda water and tea

CRIDDLE Yes, sir

[Exit]

DOLLY [*who has been sitting wearily on sofa, rises*] Well, I'm going to bed

HARRY You forget, dear

DOLLY What? [*HARRY taps the writing-desk*] Oh, my dear Harry, we won't go into them to-night

HARRY Yes, my dear, if you please [*Very firmly DOLLY makes an impatient gesture and pouts*] Please don't look like that If I'm to help you in paying off these bills, it must be to-night, or not at all

DOLLY Oh, very well, but —

[*Sits down wearily*]

PROF [*taking out watch*] Five minutes past my usual hour

DOLLY Renie has one of her bad headaches, so I've put her in the spare room

PROF Thank you I'm afraid she's a little wilful I can never get her to see that life can yield us no real satisfaction unless we regulate all our actions to the most minute point Good night

DOLLY Good night!

PROF Good night, Telfer

HARRY Good night

MATT Good night, Harry

HARRY Good night, Dad

MATT [*to DOLLY*] Night-night, dear

DOLLY Night-night, Dad

[*Kissing him*]

PROF [*has been waiting at door*] I might perhaps show you the precise way of mixing the Pablene

MATT If you don't mind! What's the dose?

PROF Two teaspoonfuls On certain occasions I have taken as much as four tablespoonfuls

MATT Wasn't that rather—going it?

PROF No It's quite tasteless, except for a very slight beany flavor

MATT Sounds just the thing for a New Year's drink to brace up good resolutions Come along! I'll have a regular night-cap of it

[*Exeunt MATT and PROFESSOR*]

HARRY Now we can have our cosy half-hour

DOLLY Ye-es I've had an awful evening with Lucas Don't you think —?

HARRY No, my darling You put it off after tea —

DOLLY But our heads will be so much clearer in the morning —

HARRY My darling, remember what Pilcher said about procrastination And remember our resolutions last night If we break them on the first night of the year, where shall we be on the thirty first of December?

DOLLY I'm hornbly fagged

HARRY Conquer it! Think how delightful it will be to put your head on the pillow to-night, without a single anxiety without a single thought —

DOLLY Except my gratitude to you!

HARRY Come, dear, no time like the present!

DOLLY [*jumps up very briskly*] No time like the present! Oh, Harry, what a dear, kind, good husband you've always been to me!

HARRY Have I, my darling? [*Modestly*] I've done my best —

DOLLY How I must have tried you!

HARRY No, dear—at least a little sometimes

DOLLY When I think what patience you've had with me, and never reproached me —

HARRY Well, not often We've had our little tiffs— That day at Goodwood—eh?

DOLLY Don't speak of it! I was to blame —

HARRY No, dear, I can't let you accuse yourself I was quite in the wrong

DOLLY No, dear, it was my fault entirely!

HARRY Well, we won't quarrel about that Now these bills —

DOLLY And what good pals we've been!

HARRY And always shall be

[*Kissing her*]

DOLLY [*hugging him*] Oh, you dear!

HARRY Now, business, business!

DOLLY [*going up to writing-desk*]

What a lucky woman I am!

HARRY [*seated at table*] Bring them all

DOLLY [*has opened desk and taken up some bills—she looks round dubiously at HARRY*] What a splendid thing it must be to be a husband and have it in your power to make your wife adore you, by simply paying a few bills

HARRY Yes—bring them all [*She comes down with a bundle of about fifteen, hands them to him*] Is this all?

DOLLY All, of any importance

HARRY I want to see them all

DOLLY So you shall, but we'll go through these first, because [*lamely*] if you want to ask any questions we can settle them on the spot, can't we?

HARRY [*reading from the bill*] Maison Récamier, Court and artistic millinery By Jove!

[*Looks up*]

DOLLY What!

HARRY One, two, three, four, five, six seven eight, nine—nine hats!

DOLLY Different kinds of hats

HARRY Yedda straw, four guineas, ostrich feather ruffle, twelve pounds ten —

DOLLY That was the one—you remember—when I came into the room you said, "Stay there! Just as you are! I must kiss you!"

HARRY Yes, but twelve pounds ten—Moss green chip hat, four, fourteen, six Helotrope velvet toque—

DOLLY That's the dear little toque you admire so much!

HARRY Do I? Six guineas! Dear little toque! Hat in white Tegal with plumes of Nattier Bleu—fifteen guineas—Fifteen guineas?

DOLLY Oh, the woman's a fearful swind'er! But what are you to do with such people?

HARRY [*with bill*] Total, sixty-four, seven, six And I get my one silk topper a year, at a guinea, and three and six for doing it up Total for me, one, four, six Total for you —

DOLLY My dear Harry, don't make absurd comparisons!

HARRY [*taking another bill*] John Spearman, artistic gown maker, ball gowns, reception gowns, race gowns—Good heavens!

DOLLY What's the matter?

HARRY Total, five hundred and fifty-six pounds—that can't be right!

DOLLY [*frightened*] No, it can't be! Add it up!

HARRY [*reading*] Tea gown of chiffon taffeta —

DOLLY The one I took to Folkestone, you remember?

[*With a little attempt at a kiss*]

HARRY [*gently repulsing her*] No, I don't [*She puts her arms round his neck, he gently pushes her aside*] Business first, please [*Reads*] Gown of white cloth with Postillon coat of Rose du Barri silk, motifs of silver, forty-five guineas —

DOLLY You won't grumble at that, for when I first put it on, you stood and looked at me and said, "I want to know how it is, Doll, that the moment a dress gets on to your shoulders, it seems to brisk up, and be as cocky and proud of itself —"

[*Again attempting to embrace him*]

HARRY [*again repulsing her*] Yes, well now I do know! Jolly proud and cocky your dresses ought to feel at this price! [*Reads*] "Evening cloak of strawberry satin charmeuse, trimmed silk passementerie, motifs and fringe stoles of dull gold

embroidery, thirty-five guineas" What's a motif?

DOLLY It's a trimming—a lot of little touches—a sort of—a—a—a—[*making a little descriptive gesture*] a suggestion—a motif —

HARRY And Mr John Spearman's motif is that I should pay him five hundred and fifty-six pounds Well, I don't like Mr John Spearman's motifs, and I'm not going to fall in with them [*Puts the bill on the table rather angrily, takes up another, reads*] "Artistic lingerie!" I wonder why all these people call themselves artists! "Underwear of daintiness and distinction"

DOLLY Well, you've always praised

HARRY Yes In future, I'm going to be very careful what articles of your dress I praise "Three pairs of blue silk garters, forty-five shillings" [*She has settled herself in the armchair, looking a little sulky and obstinate, leaning back and pettishly swinging one leg over the other*] What have you got to say to that?

DOLLY Garters are necessary

HARRY Yes, but why three? And why blue silk? Why don't you speak?

DOLLY The garters can speak for themselves!

HARRY Very well Garters that can speak for themselves can pay for themselves! [*Dashes the bill on the table, takes up another Reading*] Three bottles Coeur de Janette—three bottles Souffle de Marguerite—fifteen pounds for scent—and I have to smoke sixpenny cigars! And sometimes only fourpenny!

DOLLY Well, if you will smoke those horrid strong things you can't wonder I have to disinfect the house for you

HARRY Disinfect the house for me! You'll very soon disinfect the house of me! [*Glances through the remaining bills, groans, puts them on the table, and walks about in despair DOLLY rises and is going off*] Where are you going?

DOLLY To bed

HARRY [*stopping her*] No! Now we've begun, we'll go through to the bitter end, if you please I want you to explain —

DOLLY My dear Harry, it will be quite useless for me to try to explain in your present state —

HARRY [*getting furious*] In my present state —

DOLLY Dancing about the room and shouting! —

HARRY I'm not shouting!

DOLLY You're not shouting?!

HARRY No, and if I am, isn't it enough to make a man shout when his wife—

[*MATT appears at the door in his dressing-gown and slippers*]

MATT Excuse my interrupting But you know my room is just above this, and if you could manage to pitch your voices in rather a softer key—

HARRY By Jove! I'd forgotten! We were getting a little noisy I'm awfully sorry

MATT Don't mention it! The Professor gave me a rather stiff go of his Pablene, and I fancy it hasn't agreed with me [*tapping his chest*] for I can't get a wink of sleep Is there a spoonful of whisky about?

HARRY On the sideboard in the dining-room

MATT Thankee [*Tapping his chest*] Harry, when you get over fifty, don't change your night-cap, or any of your other bad habits

HARRY I won't Now, Dolly—

MATT [*anxiously*] You won't perhaps be very long now?

DOLLY No, we'd nearly finished—

MATT Nothing serious, I hope?

DOLLY Harry doesn't approve of my using scent

HARRY Not in pailfuls Certainly not

DOLLY I had three small bottles—

MATT Montaigne says that the sweetest perfume a woman can have, is to have none at all [*Exit*]

HARRY Now, my darling, we shall best arrive at an understanding if we avoid all temper, and discuss it in a calm, business-like way

DOLLY [*a little frightened*] Ye-es—

HARRY Very well then, come and sit down and let us go into it, figure by figure, item by item, and see how we stand

DOLLY Ye-es Harry, you aren't going to be as business-like as all that?

HARRY As all what?

DOLLY I can't discuss it while you keep me at a distance! [*Suddenly rushes at him, seats herself on his knee, puts his arm round her waist, kisses him*] There! now I feel I can discuss it thoroughly

HARRY Very well [*kisses her*], so long as we do discuss it thoroughly

DOLLY I began to get quite frightened of you, Mr Jobling

HARRY Jobling?

DOLLY The man Mr Pilcher had to get a money-box for, because he swore at his wife!

HARRY Oh, yes

DOLLY You got so angry—and shouted—

HARRY Well, there was no reason for that, especially as getting out of temper is the one thing I'm quite resolved to conquer this New Year—

DOLLY [*kissing him*] Don't forget that!

HARRY [*kisses her*] Now, business, business! [*Takes up a bill*] What have we here? Carchet, gantier et bonnetier, artiste—Hillo, here's another artist! In stockings this time [*Suddenly*] I say!

DOLLY [*frightened*] Eh?

HARRY [*points to an item in bill*] Come now, Dolly—this is really too bad—this really is too bad!

DOLLY [*frightened*] What?!

[*Getting off his knee*]

HARRY One dozen pairs best silk hose, with clocks—

DOLLY Yes—how much does that come to?

HARRY Eleven pounds two—

DOLLY It does seem rather a high price, but—

[*Drawing up her dress and showing an inch or two of silk stocking*]

HARRY You're wearing them about the house?

DOLLY I can't go about the house without stockings And I put them on for your especial benefit [*He utters a contemptuous exclamation*] They're a lovely quality—

[*Drawing up her dress an inch or two higher*]

HARRY I daresay [*Turning away*] I'm not going to admire your stockings, or your ostrich ruffles, or your blue silk garters, or your motifs, or anything that is yours! It's too expensive!

DOLLY [*dress an inch higher, looking down at her stockings*] It's the clocks you have to pay for—

HARRY I beg your pardon, it's the clocks I haven't got to pay for! And I don't mean to—if I can help it Idiotic thing to go and put clocks on stockings—[*muttering*]—damned silly idiotic—

DOLLY Ah! [*Goes to table, brings the hospital box and puts it in front of him*] Double fine this time

HARRY What for?

DOLLY Naughty swear word, and getting out of temper

HARRY Oh well—[*fumbling in his pocket*]—I did say d—, but I didn't get out of temper!

DOLLY You didn't get out of temper?

HARRY Not at all I'm quite calm [*Sulkily puts a shilling in the box*] There! [*Sits himself at table*] Now we'll go

quietly and methodically through the remainder—[*taking up a bill, looks at it, exclaims*]—good heavens!

DOLLY Good heavens what?

HARRY [*in a low exhausted tone with groans*] Good heavens! Good heavens! It's absolutely useless— Good heavens!

DOLLY But what is it?

[*Coming up, looking over*]

HARRY [*points to bill*] Four more here Thirteen hats!

DOLLY No, one was a toque

HARRY But can you explain?

DOLLY Yes You said yourself that Madame Recamier was horribly expensive, so I left her and went to Jacquelin's—just to save your pocket—

HARRY Never save my pocket again, please

DOLLY Very well, I won't

HARRY No, I daresay you won't, but I shall! I shall draw the strings very tightly in future Save my pocket [*He is walking about distractedly*] Save my pocket [*Groans*]

DOLLY Now, Harry, it's useless to take it in this way—you knew when you married me I hadn't got the money sense—

HARRY [*groans*] I hadn't got any sense at all!

DOLLY Very likely not But try and have a little now What have I done? Run a little into debt, solely to please you

HARRY Yes, well, now run out of it, and I shall be better pleased still

DOLLY After all, running into debt is a positive virtue beside the things that some wives do!

HARRY Oh, it's a positive virtue, is it?

DOLLY A husband is very lucky when his wife spends most of her time running up a few bills It keeps her out of mischief I'm sure you ought to feel very glad that I'm a little extravagant!

HARRY Oh, I am! I am! I'm delighted!

[*He sits at table, takes out a pencil, hurriedly puts down the amounts of the various bills—she creeps up behind him*]

DOLLY What are you doing?

HARRY I'm totting up to see how lucky I am! Forty-one, one, six—[*groans*] Ninety-four—

DOLLY [*has crept up behind him, puts her arms round his neck*] Now, Harry, will you take my advice—?

HARRY No

DOLLY It's past eleven

[*Trying to take the pencil out of his hand*]

HARRY [*disengaging her arms, speaking very sternly*] Will you have the goodness to let me have all your bills, so that I may know what help I shall need from my banker?

DOLLY Harry, you don't mean that? Oh, that's absurd with our income!

HARRY Will you have the goodness to do as I say, and at once, please? [*He is doting down figures She stands still in the middle of the room*] Did you hear me?

[*She bursts into tears He turns round and shows symptoms of relenting toward her, but steels himself and turns to the bills She bursts into renewed tears He goes on figuring*]

DOLLY [*piteously*] Harry! Harry! [*Goes up to him and plucks his sleeve*] Harry!

HARRY Well?

[*He turns and looks at her, is about to yield, but resists, turns away from her, settles resolutely to his figures*]

DOLLY And on the first night of the New Year, too! Just as we were going to be so happy! Harry! [*Holds out her arms appealingly*] Harry! [*HARRY suddenly turns round and clasps her*] How could you be so unkind to me?

HARRY Was I? I didn't mean to be Now! Dry your tears, and help me reckon this up—

DOLLY Ye-es

HARRY But first of all let me have the remainder of the bills—

DOLLY Yes

HARRY At once, my darling—it's getting late

DOLLY Yes [*Goes up to desk*] You won't reproach me?

HARRY Of course I won't

DOLLY I can bear anything except your reproaches Promise you won't reproach me

HARRY I won't, unless—

DOLLY Unless what?

HARRY It's something too awful

DOLLY Oh, it isn't Not at all Not at all [*Goes up to the desk, brings down about ten more bills with great affected cheerfulness*] There! You see, it's nothing

HARRY [*hastily looking at the totals*] Nothing? You call these nothing!?

DOLLY Nothing to speak about—nothing awful!

HARRY Good heavens! How any woman with the least care for her husband, or her home—[*looking at one total after another*]—how any woman with the least self-respect—[*DOLLY goes to him, puts her arms round him, tries to embrace—he*]

repulses her] No, please I've had enough of that old dodge

DOLLY Dodge!

HARRY I remember that last two hundred pounds and how you sweedled me out of it

DOLLY Sweedled?

HARRY Yes, sweedled!

DOLLY There's no such word!

HARRY No, but there's the thing! As most husbands know [*Referring to one bill after another, picking out items*] Lace coat, hand-made! En-tout-cas, studded cabochons of lapis lazuli—studded cabochons—studded cabochons!

DOLLY [*has quietly seated herself, and is looking at the ceiling*] Couldn't you manage to pitch your voice in rather a softer key?

HARRY [*comes angrily down to her, bills in hand, speaks in a whisper, very rapidly and fiercely*] Yes! And I say that a woman who goes and runs up bills like these [*dashing the back of one hand against the bills in the other*] while her husband is smoking threepenny cigars, will very soon bring herself and him to one of those new palatial workhouses where, thank heaven, the cuisine and appointments are now organized with a view of providing persons of your tastes with every luxury at the ratepayers' expense [*Returns angrily to the bills, turns them over*] Irish lace bolero! [*Turns to another*] Fur motor coat, fifty-five guineas—

DOLLY [*calmly gazing at the ceiling*] You to'd me to look as smart as Mrs Colefield

HARRY Not at that price! If I'd known what that motor tour would cost, by Jove! I'd—

DOLLY You're getting noisy again You'll wake my father

HARRY He ought to be waked! He ought to know what his daughter is saddling me with

DOLLY Very well, if you don't care how shabby I look—

HARRY Shabby! [*Referring to bills*] Lace demu-toilette! Point de Venise lace Directoire coat! Shabby?

DOLLY My dear Harry, do you suppose we shall ever agree as to what constitutes shabbiness?

HARRY No, I'm hanged if we ever shall!

DOLLY Then suppose we drop the subject For the future I shall endeavor to please you entirely

HARRY Oh, you will?

DOLLY By dressing so that you'll be

ashamed to be seen in the same street with me I shall make myself a perfect fright—a perfect dowdy—a perfect draggletail!

HARRY Then I shall not be seen in the same street with you

DOLLY You won't?

HARRY No, my dear Make no mistake about that!

DOLLY You'll be seen with somebody else, perhaps?

HARRY Very likely

DOLLY Have you met Miss Smithson again?

HARRY Not since the last time

DOLLY Have you seen her since we were at Folkestone?

HARRY What's that to do with your bills?

DOLLY A great deal That night at dinner she told you her dress allowance was a hundred and twenty a year, and you said you wished she'd give me a few lessons in economy

HARRY I did not

DOLLY Pardon me, you did!

HARRY Pardon me, I did not I said she might give some women a lesson in economy

DOLLY You did not! I heard every word of your conversation, and you distinctly asked her to give me, your wife, a few lessons in economy

HARRY I'll swear I didn't!

DOLLY Ask my father! He was there

HARRY Very well! I'll ask him the first thing in the morning

DOLLY No, to-night! You've accused me of deliberately saying what isn't true, and I—

HARRY I have not!

DOLLY Yes, you have And I insist on having it cleared up to-night! I don't suppose he's asleep! Fetch him down!

HARRY Very well! I will fetch him down! [*Exit*]

DOLLY [*paces furiously up and down*] Me! Lessons in economy! Lessons in economy! Me! Lessons in economy! And from Miss Smithson! From that creature! Lessons in economy! [*Re-enter HARRY*]

HARRY He'll be down in a minute! Meantime [*very angry*] I want to know what any woman in this world wants with two dozen cache corsets?

[*Banging his free hand on the bills*]

DOLLY We'll clear up Miss Smithson first—

HARRY No, we will not clear up Miss Smithson—

DOLLY Because you can't clear up Miss Smithson—

HARRY I can clear up Miss Smithson—

DOLLY You cannot clear up Miss Smithson—[*MATT appears at door in dressing-gown, rubbing his eyes and looking very sleepy*] Dad, you remember Miss Smithson—

MATT [*coming in, very sleepy*] Smithson?

DOLLY The girl at the hotel at Folkestone, that Harry paid so much attention to

HARRY I paid no more attention to Miss Smithson than was absolutely necessary Did I, Mr Barron?

DOLLY Oh! Oh! Dad, you remember—

MATT Not for the moment—

DOLLY Not the disgraceful way Harry—there's no other word—carried on!

HARRY I did not carry on—Mr Barron, I appeal to you

DOLLY Dad!

MATT My dear, I certainly did not notice—

DOLLY No, he was far too careful to let anyone notice it, except his own wife!

HARRY You lay your life when I do carry on my wife will be the last person I shall allow to notice it!

DOLLY I daresay! Dad, did you hear that?

MATT Yes [*Rousing himself a little*] Now, Harry, what about Miss Smithson?

HARRY That's what I want to know!

MATT Who is Miss Smithson?

DOLLY Surely you remember that lanky girl—

HARRY Miss Smithson is not lanky

DOLLY Not lanky? Not lanky!? You can't have any eyes—!

HARRY That's what I've often thought—

DOLLY Oh! Oh! Dad!

MATT Come, Harry, let's clear this up [*Suadently*] Smithson? Oh yes! The girl who sat on your left at your dinner party—

DOLLY That's the one!

MATT I should call her a trifle lanky Harry

DOLLY A trifle? Well, never mind! You remember that dinner party—

MATT [*cautiously*] Ye-es

DOLLY You remember how she waited for a lull in the talk, and then she said with that silly, simpering, appealing look—

HARRY Miss Smithson's look is not silly or simpering

DOLLY Well, it's appealing, isn't it?

HARRY [*with a little chuckle*] Oh, yes, it's appealing

DOLLY Oh! Dad!

MATT [*quiets her*] Shush!—What did she say?

DOLLY She said with a very marked glance at me, "My dress allowance is a hundred and twenty a year, and I don't understand how any reasonable woman can wish for more!" What do you think of that?

MATT Well, if she did say that, and if she glanced at you, it—

DOLLY Yes?

MATT It wasn't very nice of her

DOLLY Nice? It was an insult! A direct, intentional, abominable insult, wasn't it?

MATT Yes, yes, decidedly, under the circumstances—

DOLLY And Harry ought to have resented it?

MATT At his own dinner table he couldn't, could he?

DOLLY Yes! At least, if he couldn't resent it, he ought to have *shown* that he resented it! Instead of that, he actually asked her to give me a few lessons in economy!

HARRY I did not!

DOLLY Pardon me, you did! Me! his wife! Lessons in economy!

HARRY And a thundering good thing if she had given you a few before you ran up these bills!

[*Dashes his hand on to the bills*]

DOLLY There! You hear?

MATT Come, Harry, you oughtn't to have asked another woman to give your wife lessons in economy

HARRY I didn't!

DOLLY Dad! You were there—

MATT Yes, but I don't quite remember—

DOLLY You don't remember? Sure! you can remember a simple thing like that when your own daughter tells you it was so!

MATT Now, Harry, what did you really say to Miss Smithson?

HARRY I said she might give *some* women a lesson in economy

MATT Not meaning Dolly?

HARRY No-o

DOLLY Then whom did he mean? Lessons in economy? Whom *could* he mean if he didn't mean me?

HARRY Just so!

DOLLY Ah! There! You see, he owns it!

MATT No, no, I'm sure he doesn't mean it! Did you, Harry?

DOLLY Then will he please say what he really does mean?

MATT Now, Harry, what do you really mean?

HARRY Well, you remember that night of the dinner party at Folkestone?

MATT [*cautiously*] Ye-es—

HARRY After they'd all gone you and I went into the smoking-room, didn't we?

MATT [*cautiously*] Ye-es

HARRY And you said, "Doll's in one of her high gales again!"

DOLLY High gales? Father! You didn't say that?

MATT No, no, my dear—

HARRY Excuse me, those were your exact words High gales!

MATT I don't remember

DOLLY No, you don't remember anything

HARRY You said, "What on earth was up between her and Miss Smithson at dinner?"

DOLLY You see! That proves exactly what I said!

HARRY No, by Jove, it proves that your father noticed what a confounded, cussed—

DOLLY Go on! Go on! Say it!

MATT Shush! Shush! Well, Harry, what did you say?

HARRY Well, not wishing to give Dolly away—

DOLLY Ha! ha! Not wishing to give me away!

HARRY Not then! But, by Jove, if any decent chap were to come along now—

DOLLY [*exploding*] There! There! [*To MATT*] And you sit there and hear my own husband insult me in my own house!

MATT No! No!

DOLLY But there you sit! There you sit!

MATT [*jumps up fiercely*] Now, Harry!

HARRY [*fiercely*] Well, now, Mr Barron—

DOLLY Why don't you defend me? Why don't you demand an apology?

MATT What for?

DOLLY For everything! For to-night! For that night at Folkestone!

HARRY That night at Folkestone! Why, your father was quite on my side—

MATT What?

DOLLY He wasn't, were you, Dad?

MATT N-no

HARRY What? [*Fiercely*] Do you re-

member exactly what passed between us in the smoking-room, Mr Barron?

MATT No

HARRY Then I'll tell you—

MATT [*retreating towards door*] No—no—I don't want to know—

HARRY [*following him up, shouting a little*] You said, "I know what she's like in her high gales! I remember what the little devil was like at home!"

DOLLY [*pursuing him up to door*] Father! You didn't say that!

MATT No—no, my darling—quite a mistake—quite a mistake—altogether a mistake

[*Gets thankfully off at back*]

DOLLY [*calls after him*] Then why don't you stay and tell him so!

HARRY [*shouts after MATT*] It's not a mistake!

DOLLY [*calls after MATT*] It's cowardly of you to leave me here to be insulted!

HARRY [*goes up to door, shouts*] It's not a mistake! You patted me on the back and said, "Poor chap! Poor chap!" You know you did! [*Closes the door, comes fiercely down to DOLLY*] It's not a mistake! He could see you had insulted Miss Smithson

DOLLY I had not insulted her! I was far too civil to her, considering that the next evening you took her out on the Leas, when you ought to have been at billiards—

HARRY I took her out on the Leas!

DOLLY Yes! You weren't in the billiard-room! So where were you? Where were you?

HARRY I jolly well don't know, and I—

DOLLY Say it! Say it!

HARRY I damned well don't care!

DOLLY Ah! [*She seizes the box, brings it up to him, puts it irritatingly in front of him, he seizes it, they struggle for it, trying to take it out of each other's hands, she screams, he tries to get it, there is a scuffle round the room, he tries to rub her knuckles, she makes a feint to bite him, in the struggle the box drops on the floor a little below the table, right*] Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY Now, for the last time, have I all your bills?

DOLLY Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY Have I all your bills?

DOLLY Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

HARRY Once more, madam, have I all your bills?

DOLLY No, you haven't!

HARRY Then please hand them over to me this instant, so that I may take proceedings

DOLLY [*laughing*] Proceedings! Ha! Take your proceedings!

HARRY By Jove I will take proceedings!

DOLLY Take them! Take them!

HARRY [*walking about furiously with the bills*] So this is the way the money goes! [*Banging the bills*] While I have to smoke twopenny cigars! And can't get a decent dinner!

DOLLY You can't get a decent dinner?

HARRY No! Look at those messes last night! They weren't fit for a cook-shop!

DOLLY Oh! Oh! Oh! Get a house-keeper! Get a housekeeper!

HARRY By Jove! that's what I mean to do!

DOLLY Have Miss Smithson! Send for her to-morrow morning! I'll hand her over the keys!

HARRY [*shouting*] And please hand me over the rest of your bills! The rest of your bills!

[*DOLLY marches up to desk MATT appears at door in dressing-gown*]

MATT I can't get a wink of sleep—

[*DOLLY takes out about twenty more bills*]

HARRY I insist on seeing the whole lot! So there!

DOLLY [*flourishing the bills, strewing them on the floor*] Well there! And there! And there! Now you've got the whole lot! And I hope you're satisfied! I'm going into Reme's room! [*Exit*]

HARRY You're not going into Reme's room! I insist on your going through these bills—

[*Following her off Their voices are heard retreating upstairs, DOLLY saying, "Go through the bills! Send for Miss Smithson! Have her here to-morrow morning! Take your proceedings" HARRY saying, "I insist on going through the bills to-night! Do you hear, madam, I insist! Will you come down and go through these bills," etc*]

MATT [*sees the box on floor, picks it up, carefully places it on table*] We're making a splendid start for the New Year!

[*Exit*]

CURTAIN

(*A year passes between Acts III and IV*)

ACT IV

SCENE—*The same The sofa now fronts the fireplace The armchair is below the sofa, a little to its right The other furniture remains the same*

TIME—*Afternoon of January 1, 1908*

[*Enter LUCAS, followed by CRIDDLE LUCAS has his left collar-bone broken, and his arm is strapped across his breast, his coat is buttoned loosely over the arm, the left sleeve hanging down*]

LUCAS They've gone to meet me!

CRIDDLE Yes, sir

LUCAS By the road?

CRIDDLE Yes, sir

LUCAS That's how I've missed them! My car broke down the other side of the clump, and so I walked over the fields

CRIDDLE Yes, sir I beg pardon, I hope the arm isn't serious

LUCAS No, Criddle Just serious enough to get me a couple of months' leave, so that I could spend the New Year in England

CRIDDLE You had it very hot in India, I suppose, sir?

LUCAS Blazing!

CRIDDLE We've got the same old weather here, you see, sir

LUCAS Same old weather! Had any visitors for Christmas, Criddle?

CRIDDLE Mr Barron, of course, and Professor and Mrs Sturgess

LUCAS Same old visitors—same visitors, I should say Mr Pilcher still Vicar here, I suppose?

CRIDDLE Yes, sir He gave us a wonderful sermon at the old year's service last night

LUCAS Same old sermon!

CRIDDLE No, sir Not exactly the same sermon, though it had similar points to last year! Ah! You came over for the old year's service last year?

LUCAS Yes, and a rattling good sermon it was!

CRIDDLE Very powerful and persuading, wasn't it, sir? It even touched me up a bit

LUCAS In what way, Criddle?

CRIDDLE I used to have my ten bob on any horse as I fancied, but I never put a farthing on anything—not even on Sulky Susan for the Oaks

LUCAS You didn't?

CRIDDLE No, and thank God, in a manner of speaking, that I didn't, for she

never pulled it off I owe that to Mr Pilcher No, I never touched a thing till the Leger That reminds me—

LUCAS What, Criddle?

CRIDDLE Why, last year, after Mr Pilcher's sermon, the master had a collecting box, and when he found himself going a bit off the straight he used to put in a shilling or half-a-crown for Mr Pilcher's Blanket fund—

LUCAS Yes, of course! And Uncle Matt promised him a sovereign for each of us if we had carried out our good resolutions Is that coming off, Criddle?

CRIDDLE I expect it is, sir Mr Pilcher is coming here this afternoon, and the master told me to be sure and find the box before he gets here

LUCAS Find the box?

CRIDDLE Nobody has seen anything of it for some months Excuse me, sir, I must look for it

[*Exit CRIDDLE LUCAS takes out letter from an unsealed envelope, glances through it, sits at table, takes out pencil, adds a short note, puts letter in envelope, seals it up, puts it in his tail pocket, goes to conservatory, looks in*
RENIE enters at door behind him She starts, as he turns round]

RENIE [*in a whisper*] You're here already?

LUCAS Yes—

RENIE Your wound?

LUCAS Much better Nearly well

RENIE I'm so glad—

LUCAS I'm not I shall have to cut it back to India directly Why didn't you answer my last letter?

RENIE I did—and tore it up

LUCAS Tore it up?

RENIE What's the use? I told you last year we could never be anything to each other!

LUCAS But you didn't mean it!

[*He seizes her hand and kisses it several times*]

RENIE [*feebly attempting to withdraw it*] Yes—yes, I did Hush!

LUCAS I want you to read this

[*Shows her the letter*]

MATT [*heard through the door which is open a few inches*] Have you found the box, Criddle?

CRIDDLE No, sir I've hunted everywhere

MATT Have another look We must have it ready for Mr Pilcher

[*MATT enters Meantime RENIE has crept to upper conservatory door and gone off signing to LUCAS to keep*

silence He has taken the letter out of his pocket and held it up for her to see, putting it back before MATT enters]

MATT Ah, Lucas So you've got here Happy New Year!

LUCAS Happy New Year, Uncle Matt [*Cordially shaking hands*]

MATT Glad to see you back in England

LUCAS Glad to be back!

MATT How's the arm?

LUCAS Splendid—nearly well Dolly and Harry all right?

MATT First rate They'll be here directly

LUCAS The Sturgesses are here again, Criddle tells me

MATT Ye es

LUCAS Gray matter still going strong?

MATT Booming

LUCAS How's Mrs Sturgess?

MATT As usual Lucas—

LUCAS Well?

MATT You're quite cured, eh?

LUCAS Cured?

MATT Of your infatuation for her

LUCAS Infatuation? Well, I admired her, and perhaps it was lucky I was ordered out to India—

MATT I managed that for you, my boy

LUCAS You did?

MATT Sir John wanted a smart ADC, so I drove over to Aldershot, cracked you up, and got you the job

LUCAS So that was why I was packed off It was you who—

MATT Aren't you thankful I did?

LUCAS Yes, much obliged to you, much obliged!

MATT So you ought to be And so's the lady

LUCAS Is she?

MATT Yes When we got your wire yesterday saying you'd motor down to-day, Dolly had a long talk with her, and the result was she thanked Dolly and me for getting you out of the way and saving her from you

LUCAS Did she?

MATT Yes, for twenty minutes She kissed Dolly, and I think she would have kissed me, only I didn't feel myself quite worthy

LUCAS Oh, so that's all settled!

MATT That's all settled At least, let's hope so

LUCAS What do you mean?

MATT Well, you won't come—

LUCAS What?

MATT The same old game

LUCAS What same old game?

MATT Why, *the* same old game!

LUCAS You must be judging me by yourself, when you were young

MATT My dear boy, that's just what I am doing Lucas, there's not going to be any repetition—

LUCAS No—no

MATT Because it isn't the right thing to do, is it?

LUCAS No

MATT Very well then, don't do it!

LUCAS I won't [*Listening*] Ah! [*DOLLY and HARRY'S voices heard in hall*] Dolly and Harry!

[*DOLLY and HARRY enter very lovingly*]

LUCAS Hillo, Doll, old girl! Happy New Year!

DOLLY Happy New Year, Lu!

LUCAS Harry, old brick, how goes it?

HARRY Splendid!

LUCAS Happy New Year!

HARRY Happy New Year! [*Looking lovingly at DOLLY*] By Jove, Doll, you can foot it [*To LUCAS*] Doll and I have just raced up from the farm She licked me! bless her!

DOLLY Yes, because you encouraged me!

HARRY [*looking at her lovingly and admiringly, kisses her heartily*] There aren't many things this little woman can't do

DOLLY When you encourage me!

HARRY Oh, I'll encourage you!

[*He again kisses her heartily*]

HARRY Well, Lu, old boy, glad to see you home again Arm pretty bad?

LUCAS No, nearly well, unfortunately

DOLLY Down for the day?

LUCAS Well, now my car has broken down, I was wondering if you'd put me up—

DOLLY [*firmly*] No We shall be pleased for you to stay to dinner

HARRY There's the spare room, Doll

DOLLY [*firmly*] No That may be wanted for Renie, or myself

HARRY [*half aside to her*] I say, not for you, old girl!

LUCAS Oh, well, I shall have to get a shake-down at the Red Lion

[*Enter RENIE at back, still in outdoor clothes*]

RENIE [*jeaguing a little surprise*] Captain Wentworth! A Happy New Year!

LUCAS Happy New Year, Mrs Sturgess [*Shaking hands*]

RENIE So sorry to hear of your wound!

LUCAS Oh, it's healed, thank you

RENIE I'm so glad Shall you be making a long stay in England?

LUCAS I fear only a few days longer

RENIE I'm sorry your visit will be so short

[*CRIDDLE enters triumphantly with the hospital box, which is very moldy and dusty—he has also duster in his hand*]

CRIDDLE I've found him, sir

[*Begins to dust the box carefully*]

MATT Looks well for your household discipline here, Harry

HARRY How?

MATT You've had no occasion to use him lately

CRIDDLE [*displaying the box, having carefully dusted it*] There he is, sir, Hospital for Incurables! Nearly as good as new

MATT Where did you find him?

CRIDDLE In the wine-cellar, of all places! I was getting out a bottle of the sixty-eight port for New Year's night, and happening to put my hand behind, there he was!

HARRY [*has a sudden gesture of remembrance*] Yes, I remember!

MATT What should incurables be doing in the wine-cellar? [*Holds out his hand to CRIDDLE for the box CRIDDLE, who has been holding it carefully, gives it to MATT Exit CRIDDLE MATT gives the box a shake It rattles as if half full of coins He shakes it again, more violently, it rattles again*] Internal organs sound healthy How did he get into the wine-cellar, Harry?

HARRY Well, Dolly and I had been having a little tiff one morning—nothing serious—

MATT No When was that?

HARRY March, wasn't it?

DOLLY May, I think—

HARRY No, it wasn't that one—well, never mind, I got so riled at Dolly always poking this box in front of me whenever I happened to—so I thought the wine-cellar would be the safest place for it

MATT [*gives it another rattle*] Well, here he is, turned up just at the right moment! And here you all are, Dolly, Harry, Lucas, Mrs Sturgess—all clamoring for me to redeem my promise and put in a sovereign for each of you

[*CRIDDLE appears at door announcing*]

MR PILCHER PILCHER enters with four oblong brown paper parcels of equal size Exit CRIDDLE]

PILCHER Happy New Year to you all! Excuse me [*Depositing his parcels*] My

New Year's gifts to a few of my parish-ioners!

DOLLY New Year's gifts!

PILCHER To those who need them
[*Shaking hands with her*] Happy New Year, Mr Barron!

MATT Happy New Year!

PILCHER How do you do this morn-ing, Telfer! [*HARRY nods*] My dear Mrs Sturgess!

RENIE Happy New Year! What a lovely sermon you gave us again last night!

PILCHER Lovely! Well, say healthy, bracing

HARRY A jolly good rouser again Made me feel—Well—

PILCHER Ah, Captain Wentworth, Happy New Year!

LUCAS Happy New Year!

PILCHER I heard you were wounded—

LUCAS Oh, that's done with

MATT We were just talking about our New Year's inquest—

PILCHER Inquest?

MATT Into the characters of Dolly and Harry and—

[*Glancing at RENIE and LUCAS*]

DOLLY Oh, please don't talk about in-quests Nobody's character is dead here

MATT I hope not! We shall see—

LUCAS Uncle, you don't really mean to carry out this ridiculous idea of yours?

MATT It was a bona-fide bargain on my side but if you wish to avoid any awkward little exposures, or if Mr Pilcher will kindly waive his claims to my con-tributions—

PILCHER I'm afraid I can't I've come here for the express purpose of bearing away my trophy— Ah! [*Seeing box, takes it, gives it a shake, his features assume a pleasant smile*] It seems to have proved a very wholesome household regulator

HARRY Yes, by Jove! It hadn't been in the house twenty-four hours before I put in a sovereign

PILCHER A sovereign?

HARRY The first night of last year Dolly and I had a little tiff—nothing seri-ous—and so the next morning I made it up and—didn't I, Dolly?—

DOLLY You did! And paid my bills like a lamb, you dear!

PILCHER And put in a sovereign?
[*Rattles the box again*] I won't say "Don't have any more household tiffs," but I will say "Don't omit to liquidate them"
[*PROFESSOR STURGESS enters at*

back, with the proofs of his book in his hand]

PROF How do you do?

PILCHER How do you do? Happy New Year!

PROF Happy New Year to you! [*To LUCAS*] How d'ye do?

LUCAS First rate Happy New Year!

PROF Thank you An accident?

LUCAS Bit of one Getting over it

PROF If I might recommend the con-stant use of Pableme

LUCAS Oh, thanks, it's quite well—

PROF Try Pableme It's a wonderful restorative [*Looking round*]

PILCHER We were just about to settle the question Mr Barron raised last New Year's day—

PROF Oh yes! I remember! Curiously enough I have only this morning received the proofs of my new volume, "Free Will, the Illusion"

[*Showing the proofs to PILCHER*]

PILCHER Very interesting I should like to discuss the matter with you, but [*taking out watch*] I've so many New Year's calls to make [*Looking at MATT*] Perhaps we ought to get on with the—

a—

MATT Inquest

PILCHER Vindication

MATT [*accepting the correction*] Vin-dication

PILCHER Can you remember the exact terms?

MATT I am to pay a sovereign for every one of your hearers who has so far benefited by the wise admonitions of your last year's sermon as to have broken off his bad habits, or some especial bad habit—

LUCAS We aren't bound to say what the bad habit is that we've broken off?

MATT I don't wish to be inquisitive, but if you don't mention the particular bad habit, you'll have to give me some as-surance that you've conquered it [*Putting down proofs on table, taking up the money-box, giving it a shake*] Now, who'll be the first to step into the confessional?

[*Looking round*]

DOLLY I will, as I've nothing to con-fess

MATT Nothing?

DOLLY No I had what some husbands might think a bad habit, but—

HARRY No bills this Christmas, eh "Doll?"

DOLLY No

HARRY You're sure now, my darling?

DOLLY Well, you must have some bill

—they grow up before you know—you can't settle them all on the spur of the moment, but I've nothing of importance. So please put in your sovereign for me.

MATT Then you've absolutely broken off your bad habit of running up bills?

DOLLY Yes

MATT Entirely?

DOLLY Yes You said you wouldn't be inquisitive

PILCHER Mrs Telfer has given her word I think I may claim one victory for free will [*nodding victoriously at the PROFESSOR, who shakes his head*], and one sovereign for the Blanket Club

MATT Hum! [*Draws a sovereign out of his pocket and very reluctantly drops it into the box, shakes his head at DOLLY, who looks a little uncomfortable*] Who volunteers next? Harry?

HARRY Oh well, here goes! I'm going to make a clean breast The fact is I've made a thundering mess of it

MATT Ah!

HARRY I did begin all right except for a little tiff with Dolly—and then I kept on pretty well for some time, and then—well I don't know—I seemed to go all to pieces and—[*MATT rattles the money-box*] However, better luck this year! But it's so jolly hard to keep it up And I'd got pretty slack till you woke us up last night—I say that was a rouser again!

PILCHER It wasn't a bad sermon, was it?

MATT No victory for free will and the Blanket Club, this time Game and game Now which of you two—

[*Looking at RENIE and LUCAS*]

RENIE I'll be your first victim [*Coming into the middle of the room, and posing*] It's so strange that what you started as a jest—

MATT Oh, no, in deadly earnest, I assure you!

RENIE In this life who knows what is jest and what is earnest? The least little innocent thing may turn into a tragedy—

MATT Surely you haven't had any little tragedies?

RENIE No, last year a mere little circumstance might have turned to a tragedy—honestly I wasn't to blame, but perhaps I was a little careless, and two dear friends came to me with their counsel, and what might have been a tragedy was turned to a comedy

PROF My dear, may I ask what "circumstance" you are alluding to?

MATT We said we wouldn't be inquisitive—

PROF No, but I cannot recall anything in my wife's life during the last twelve months that even approached a tragedy—

RENIE I said the affair was quite unimportant—

PROF Then I wish, my dear, you wouldn't magnify everything, and I wish you would read some solid scientific works in place of rubbishy French novels

MATT Meantime [*to RENIE*] may we be confident your little tragedy is ended—

RENIE Oh, yes, quite

PILCHER Another victory

MATT [*looks searchingly at her, drops a sovereign in the box*] Lucas?

LUCAS [*coming cheerfully forward*] My turn for the thumbscrew!

MATT You seem very cheerful about it

LUCAS Yes, I'm going to make a jolly good show

MATT What particular bad habit have you conquered during the past year?

LUCAS I don't know that I've conquered any one in particular, but I've had a regular good go in all round, so altogether I can pat myself on the back

MATT But I want to know one particular habit conquered—for instance, you weren't very careful what ladies you made love to, or how many of them at the same time—

LUCAS I say, Uncle Matt, drop this—

MATT And a year or two ago you went just a little bit off the straight—

LUCAS Oh no, I didn't

MATT I want to know—

LUCAS Thank you, no more thumbscrew I'm out of this before it goes any farther

MATT It isn't going any farther [*Putting his hand on LUCAS'S shoulder*] Give me your word

LUCAS It wasn't a very bad case, and—I summoned all my resolution, and there the matter ended

PILCHER I think I may claim a victory here

LUCAS So please put in your sovereign

MATT [*very seriously*] Then I may take it, Lu, you've really broken off?

LUCAS Yes, yes, of course I have [*MATT puts in a sovereign, hands the box to PILCHER*]

PILCHER Three victories and one draw out of four Most satisfactory [*Taking out watch*] I must hurry off to the White

House [*Rattling the box*] Excellent results! So excellent that I think I'm justified in making you a little New Year's gift

[*Going to his heap of brown-paper parcels*]

DOLLY A New Year's gift! How kind of you! To me?

PILCHER [*opening his parcel*] To you and your husband To your husband in particular, because, although he may have fallen a little short of perfection during the last year—like some of the rest of us—yet I feel sure that during this coming year—[*They have all been watching him curiously, he has now opened the parcel and displays a very bright brand-new collecting-box, with Crookbury Blanket Club painted on it, in large letters It is much larger than the hospital box*] My household regulator!

[*Giving it to DOLLY*]

DOLLY [*who has shown considerable disappointment on the opening of the parcel*] Crookbury Blanket Club! Thank you so much, for Harry's sake Harry! For you, dear

[*She gives the box to HARRY, who places it on the same table*]

PILCHER Well, I must be getting on [*Shaking hands*] Good-bye, Professor

PROF I should like to make that point clear with regard to free will—

PILCHER When you have an hour, or shall I say a year, to spare, we might argue it out—

PROF You're going to the White House? If I might accompany you—

PILCHER Delighted!

PROF Renie, you've had your restless fits again You'd better come with us—

RENIE But I've already been walking—

PROF My dear, this bracing country air is just what you need Keep out in it all the day long—

RENIE Oh, very well—the White House, and the fish-pond as usual, I suppose?

PROF As usual Come along

[*Exit RENIE slightly shrugs her shoulder, very slightly glances at LUCAS and exit after PROFESSOR*]

LUCAS The dear old fish-pond! We might all take a stroll there!

MATT Good idea! The dear old fish-pond! We might all take a stroll there!

[*Linking his arm with LUCAS*]

LUCAS [*suspicious, holding back*] I don't know that I care—we went there last year—

MATT We did! Same old game, eh? Come along [*Drags LUCAS off*]

PILCHER [*has been gathering up his parcels*] Well, good-bye! Good-bye! [*Rattles the hospital box vigorously*] Three splendid victories for free will and moral resolution! [*Exit, rattling the box*]

HARRY Doll, you really haven't got any bills this year?

DOLLY No, no! Only a few little oddments that no woman can prevent

HARRY You might let me see the little oddments—

DOLLY I will [*Suddenly*] Oh Harry, I quite forgot! Do forgive me!

HARRY What?

DOLLY I never wrote the geyser bath people!

HARRY Never mind the geyser bath

DOLLY And only this morning you rowed me because I hadn't got it ready for the New Year! Where did you put their address?

HARRY I don't know! Somewhere upstairs among my papers

DOLLY [*genitly pushing him off*] I can just catch to-night's post! Make haste and get it! Quick! There's a dear! And then we can get the bath fixed up for you next week

HARRY Ye—es I say, Doll, I mean to get those oddments fixed up to-night

[*Taps the writing-case significantly and exit DOLLY looks frightened, sees him off, goes up to writing-desk, takes out bills, looks at them, throws up her arms in despair, groans, slams down the writing-desk, looks at the chair she has touched in first act, shows great resolution, marches up and touches it*]

DOLLY Yes! Yes! I have got free will [*Goes back from it, again looks at it, again marches up to it, touches it*] Then why do I keep on having bills?

[*RENIE enters in great agitation and distress*]

RENIE Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY What's the matter?

RENIE Oh, Dolly!

DOLLY What is it?

RENIE [*throws her arms round DOLLY affectionately*] You've always been such a true friend to me—

DOLLY Yes, dear

RENIE More like a sister And I know I may trust you now

DOLLY [*a little suspicious*] Yes Has anything happened?

RENIE Yes Oh, Dolly—

DOLLY Tell me!

RENIE As we were going out at the

garden gate, Captain Wentworth held out a letter behind his back for me to take——

DOLLY What?!

RENIE But now his arm is wounded he couldn't manage it properly, and he dropped it I hurried to pick it up, and then my husband noticed and insisted on reading it——

DOLLY What was in the letter?

RENIE It wasn't so very bad, but my husband has chosen to jump to a wrong conclusion, and——oh, Dolly, you can help me!

DOLLY [*coldly, relaxing her embrace*] How?

RENIE If you'd only let me tell my husband that I was receiving it for you——

DOLLY What?!

RENIE There is no address, and fortunately it proved that you weren't really guilty

DOLLY Oh! I wasn't really guilty?

RENIE In fact, it proves your complete innocence

DOLLY I'm glad of that

RENIE Then you'll let me say it was you?

DOLLY No! You can't suppose I should let my own cousin make love to me in my own house?!

RENIE You won't help me?

DOLLY Yes, any way but that! How could you be so foolish?

RENIE I don't know When I heard yesterday he was coming, I quite made up my mind I'd have nothing to say to him! Dolly, free will must be an illusion, or else why do I always——oh, what shall I do?

DOLLY As you are completely innocent, you'd better ask your husband to forgive you

RENIE Ye—es No! As it is a perfectly pure and exalted attachment I shall take that ground—at any rate at first, and see what he says You'll help me all you can?

DOLLY Yes, but promise me you'll have nothing to do with Lucas in future!

RENIE No, indeed! if I once get out of this

DOLLY Very well! I'll see what I can do——hush!

[*The PROFESSOR enters with a letter in his hand, MATT soothing him*]

PROF [*very angry*] Not a word more, if you please Mrs Telfer, you have doubtless heard——

DOLLY Yes——?

PROF I leave for London to-night to consult my lawyer Mrs Sturgess will, I trust, return to her friends until——

MATT Perhaps Mrs Sturgess may be able to explain——

PROF What explanation can be offered of language like this? [*Reading from letter*] "From the first moment I saw you, I felt that you were entirely different from any woman I have ever met——" A monstrously inexact statement to start with And a woman who's capable of practicing such deceit——

[*RENIE bursts into tears*]

MATT I think you ought to hear what Mrs Sturgess has to say——

RENIE [*through her tears*] What would be the use? With such a nature as his he could never begin to understand the loyal and exalted devotion which Captain Wentworth feels for me! No, all my life I have been misunderstood, misjudged, condemned! Let it be so till the end! Dolly, come and help me pack!

[*Exit MATT goes up to table and takes up proofs of PROFESSOR'S book and looks through them*]

DOLLY You're really too severe with poor Renie——

PROF I am not severe I simply register the inevitable sentence of the husband upon the wife who misconducts herself!

DOLLY Misconducts herself! She has merely had a little harmless flirtation——

PROF In my wife a flirtation of this character [*pointing to letter in his hand*] constitutes grave misconduct

DOLLY But that's perfectly ridiculous! Why, it might happen to any woman! Dad, explain to him——

MATT Professor, you're taking altogether a wrong view of this Now this case you were pointing out to me in your own book——[*pointing to proofs*]——Number forty-nine, Mrs Conway Remarkably handsome woman too!——[*Reading*] "The injustice and cruelty of condemning this poor lady must be apparent to all" My dear Professor, before publishing this book you'll have to modify your theory

PROF I cannot modify my theory I have spent ten years in collecting facts which prove it

MATT Then, pardon me, you must really look over Mrs Sturgess's little indiscretion

PROF That is equally impossible——

MATT But you say her action in receiving my nephew's letter was entirely due to the activity of certain atoms in the gray matter of her brain

PROF Undoubtedly that is so

DOLLY Very well then, if her gray matter keeps on working wrong, what's

the use of blaming her? You say yourself there's no such thing as free will—

PROF Precisely, but I have always allowed that in the present low moral and intellectual condition of the herd of mankind, free will is a plausible working hypothesis

DOLLY But it doesn't work! Free will won't work at all! Look at my own case! Do you suppose I should go on all my life having bills if I could help myself? [*Catching MATT'S eye, who looks at her gravely and holds up his finger*] Never mind my bills! Do make him see how wrong and absurd it is to punish poor Renie when there's no such thing as free will!

MATT Dolly's right! She's only saying what you have so admirably laid down here My dear Professor, you cannot possibly publish this book!

PROF But it has been announced! I must publish it

MATT You cannot Read that [*Giving the PROFESSOR the book and pointing out passage*] Surely after that you cannot condemn Mrs Sturgess

PROF [*taking book, glancing at the passage*] Really, it's most annoying when one's own wife upsets—

MATT Oh! they're always making hay of our theories one way or the other

PROF Of course, if one presses the matter home to first principles—

DOLLY Yes! Yes! Well, why not act on your own first principles! You ought to be very sorry for poor Renie, considering all she has suffered

PROF Suffered?

DOLLY Yes, poor dear! You don't know what an awful struggle she has gone through between this unfortunate flirtation and her admiration for you

PROF Her admiration for me!

DOLLY Yes! She always speaks of you as her great protagonist of science

PROF [*mollified*] Does she? Does she?

DOLLY Yes If I were you I should go upstairs, and be very sweet to her, and above all don't reproach her We women can endure anything except reproaches—

PROF [*looking at his proofs*] I must publish my book And after all, as you say, it is useless to blame them when—a—

MATT When, bless them, they can't help themselves

PROF I will hear what she has to say—

DOLLY No! Go straight to her, and

forgive her, and don't say another word And then I'm sure her gray matter will soon be all right And what a triumph that will be for you!

PROF It does offer a way out of the difficulty [*Exit*]

DOLLY Dad, I won't have her here next Christmas

MATT No, my dear, I wouldn't

DOLLY That wretched Lucas!

MATT What is to be done with him?

DOLLY Pack him off! Pack him off at once!

[*LUCAS cautiously looks in from upper conservatory door*]

LUCAS I say, how's the old bird seem to take it?

DOLLY Old bird!

LUCAS He isn't going to make a shindy over a trifle like this?

DOLLY Trifle! He's threatening to divorce her and expose you!

LUCAS You don't say so I'm awfully sorry!

DOLLY Sorry!

LUCAS I am, indeed! And any reparation I can make—

DOLLY Reparation?!

LUCAS Such as an apology—

[*DOLLY utters a contemptuous exclamation*]

MATT Will you give me your word of honor never to see Mrs Sturgess again?

LUCAS Yes

MATT Or write to her?

LUCAS Yes

MATT The word of honor of an English gentleman used to mean something, Lu

LUCAS It does now, Uncle Matt!

MATT [*shakes hands with him heartily*] Then I'll take it Now be off as quickly as you can and let us make the best of it for you and her

LUCAS Thanks Good-bye!

MATT Good-bye!

[*LUCAS crosses to DOLLY, offers his hand*]

DOLLY No, Lu If Renie gets out of this safely and if you behave yourself, I'll shake hands with you when you come back from India

LUCAS You're taking this too seriously—you're taking it far too seriously!

[*Exit*]

MATT We're making a splendid start again for the New Year!

DOLLY I hope this will be a lesson for Renie!

MATT I hope so How about yourself?

DOLLY What do you mean?

MATT I put the sovereign in, but—you've got a few more bills, eh?

DOLLY Just a few oddments

MATT How much?

DOLLY I don't know Dad—

MATT Well?

DOLLY Now that South Africans have gone up at last, and you won that splendid coup on them last week—

MATT Well?

DOLLY You couldn't lend me—a few hundreds—till my allowance comes due? Just a few hundreds? [*Listens*] There's Harry! You will help me, Dad—you will?

MATT I'll see what I can do

[*HARRY enters cheerfully*]

HARRY That's all right, Doll! There's the address [*Giving a slip of paper*]

DOLLY Thanks, dear

HARRY And now about these mere oddments?

DOLLY Not now, dear

HARRY Yes, dear, now [*Very severely*] This instant!

DOLLY Harry, you're going to lose your temper—

HARRY No I'm going to keep a firm guard on it, but [*very severely*] let me see those bills

DOLLY [*creeps frightened up to the desk*] I'm sure you're going to lose your temper [*Opens the desk*]

HARRY [*firms*] No I'm quite calm Whose bill is that? [*She hands him one timorously*] Fulks and Garner! Artist Furrers! More artists!—[*looks at total*]—one hundred and twenty-four pounds Well, I'm—

DOLLY Ah, Jobling!

HARRY I should think I am Jobling And you said you'd never enter their shop again!

DOLLY I never meant to, but this time it was absolutely necessary—

HARRY Necessary?

DOLLY Yes—you see the chief item—

HARRY [*reads*] Chinchilla toque, coat, muff and boa—eighty guineas—eighty guineas—

DOLLY I got them as a surprise for you when we go South next week

HARRY Surprise! Great heavens! What in the name of all—

MATT Shush, Harry! Her motive was a good one She got it to please you!

DOLLY You haven't seen it yet, it's

just outside—I've got a great mind to give you a great New Year's treat and let you see it on!

HARRY I'm not going to be sweedled—

MATT Hush! Harry! Let her put it on! Let's have a look at it, and see whether it's worth the money Put it on, Doll

[*Exit DOLLY*]

HARRY [*calls after her*] I tell you I'm not going to be sweedled!—

MATT What is sweedled?

HARRY Sweedling is sweedling! It's part swindling and part wheedling! It's what every damned good-natured husband like me has to go through, when he's fool enough to put up with it!

MATT Well, old boy, you'll have to pay, you know, it will come to that in the end

HARRY I'm not going to be sweedled—

MATT And if Dolly has been a little extravagant I must help her out with it to-morrow morning!

HARRY No, we'll go into it thoroughly to-night

MATT No, Harry, we won't My room is just above here Besides, the cook is going to give us a special New Year dinner, and I want to enjoy it This New Year we'll start with a comfortable evening, please!

[*DOLLY enters at back in a very handsome chinchilla coat HARRY looks a little sulky She stands in the middle of the room and displays it*]

DOLLY Well? [*He looks at it rather sulkily, walks away, she follows him*] Well? [*Walking after him*] Well? Well?

[*He turns, looks at her, she stands and holds out her arms*]

HARRY Oh, hang it all! [*Takes her in his arms and kisses her*] There!

DOLLY [*kissing him heartily*] And there! [*Another kiss*] And there! [*Another kiss*] And there! [*Catches sight of the collecting-box, goes to it, furiously sweeps it off its table on to the floor*] And there!

CURTAIN

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The Two Mr. Weiherbys, St. John Hankin
What Every Woman Knows, Sir James Barrie
Penelope, Somerset Maugham

THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

(1907)

BY

ST JOHN HANKIN

CHARACTERS

HUGO DE MULLIN
JANE DE MULLIN, *his wife*
MRS CLOUSTON, *his sister*
JANET DE MULLIN (*Mrs Seagrave*), *Hugo's eldest daughter*
JOHNNY SEAGRAVE, *her son*
HESTER DE MULLIN, *her sister*
BERTHA ALDENHAM
MONTY BULSTEAD
DR ROLT, *the local doctor*
MR BROWN, *the curate*
MISS DEANES
ELLEN, *maid at the De Mullins'*

The action takes place at Brendon Underwood in Dorset, Acts One and Three at the Manor House, the De Mullins' house in the village, Act Two on the borders of Brendon Forest Three days pass between Acts One and Two, and five between Acts Two and Three

ST JOHN HANKIN

WHEREAS the plays of Jones and Pinero were written unreservedly for the commercial theater, there were at the turn of the century a number of playwrights devoted primarily to the betterment of the theater through the creation and production of a more intellectual type of drama. Although Jones and Pinero were desirous of reuniting drama and literature, which had been ignominiously separated for more than a century, they were willing to make vast concessions to the box-office and to the puerile tastes of the playgoers of their day. The founding of the Irish National Theatre Society, of the Stage Society, and of numerous Sunday production groups, and such ventures as the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and as the management of the Court Theatre in London by Granville-Barker delivered a much needed assault on the pernicious long-run system, and made possible public performance of plays by Shaw, Lady Gregory, Synge, Houghton, Hankin, and other playwrights whom the commercial manager had ignored. One of the obstacles to the satisfactory development of an adult national drama in England and America has been the persistence of the long-run system, although since the war stage societies and provincial repertory theaters in England and such experimental groups as the Theater Guild and the Le Gallienne Repertory Theatre in New York have aroused an increasing interest in the literary drama.

One of the most distinguished dramatists of this early "theater of ideas" was St. John Hankin, whose untimely death occurred just when his exercise of a limited but exquisite talent was rapidly becoming more sure and deft. St. John Emile Clavering Hankin was born in 1860 in Southampton, and was educated at Malvern and at Merton College, Oxford. He became a successful journalist in London, serving on the staffs of the *Times* and *Punch*. As he was a man possessed of some means as well as an artistic conscience, he did not write plays designed to arouse a wide popularity. His comedies were first produced by Granville-Barker at the Court Theatre and soon won him a gratifying reputation among the small nucleus of intelligent playgoers who were destined to act as a civilizing leaven in the commercial theater. During the seven years preceding his death in 1909 he wrote his plays: five of full length, two of one act, and one longer play which he left unfinished. The total output was slight but a valuable contribution to the pre-modern drama. *The Two Mr. Weiherbys* (1902) concerns the assorted discomforts attendant upon living up to a good but undeserved reputation, *The Return of the Prodigal* (1904) is a satire on middle-class ideals of social and maternal success, *The Charity that Began at Home* (1905), like Henry Arthur Jones's *Crusaders*, is a satire on ill-advised philanthropy, *The Cassius Engagement* (1905), long a favorite among amateur dramatic groups, is a twentieth-century version of *Caste*, with a cynical ending, *The Last of the De Mullins* (1907) was the last completed long play.

The Last of the De Mullins differs from its predecessors in its greater seriousness and naturalness and in an emotional quality missing in the earlier brilliant and hard comedies. He endows Janet, an emancipated heroine of the Ibsen-Sudermann-Shaw type, with genuine feeling as well as reason. In all the plays there is one completely rational and un-hypocritical character placed among a group of conventional, genteel people (a favorite situation also in the plays of Ibsen, Wilde, and Shaw). This character, however, is not the *raisonneur* of the Jones and Pinero type, for Hankin is artist enough to write objec-

tively and invest each character with individual plausibility. In *The Last of the De Mullins* Janet turns the merciless light of her experiences and reason upon the absurdities and perils of an obsolete feudalism, in addition she challenges the despotism of conventional morality and makes the eternal demand of the individualist to live one's own life as one sees fit. Although Janet's tirades almost become rant, they never descend into mere rhetoric, for the feeling back of them is genuine. In spite of Hankin's cynicism and contempt of sentimentality, he wisely allows a measure of pity for the father to insure a finer dramatic balance.

The faults of Hankin's plays are the lack of genuine human interest and emotional momentum, the rather mechanical plots with practically no suspense, a brilliant surface sparkle with little depth, a general lack of robustness. The virtues are more numerous: an engaging literary style, intellectual honesty, excellent dry humor, truthful endings, clear and pungent characterizations, fresh and sparkling dialogue. With no great fecundity of dramatic invention he was a valuable pioneer in the revolt against the crudities of the commercial Victorian and Edwardian drama. With his keen and humorous perception of current social imbecilities and hypocrisies and his predilection for ideas rather than for situation and event he gives to his plays an intellectual content not common in pre-war drama, and with a fine discipline of language (as John Drinkwater defines "style") he fashions his plays into literature.

THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

ACT I

4

SCENE—*The Inner Hall at the Manor House in Brendon-Underwood village. An old-fashioned, white-paneled room. At the back is a big stone-mullioned Tudor window looking out on to the garden. On the left of this is a bay in which is a smaller window. A door in the bay leads out into the garden. People entering by this door pass the window before they appear. The furniture is oak, mostly Jacobean or older. The right-hand wall of the room is mainly occupied by a great Tudor fireplace, over which the De Mullin coat-of-arms is carved in stone. Above this a door leads to the outer hall and front door. A door on the opposite side of the room leads to the staircase and the rest of the house. The walls are hung with a long succession of family portraits of all periods in all stages of dinginess as to both canvas and frame. When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then HESTER is seen to pass the window at the back, followed by MR BROWN. A moment later they enter. MR BROWN is a stout, rather unwholesome-looking curate, HESTER a lean, angular girl of twenty-eight, very plainly and unattractively dressed in somber tight-fitting clothes. She has a cape over her shoulders and a black hat on. BROWN wears seedy clerical garments, huge boots and a squashy hat. The time is twelve o'clock in the morning of a fine day in September.*

HESTER Come in, Mr Brown. I'll tell mother you're here. I expect she's upstairs with father.

[*Going towards door.*]

BROWN Don't disturb Mrs De Mullin, please. I didn't mean to come in.

HESTER You'll sit down now you are here?

BROWN Thank you. [*Does so awkwardly.*] I'm so glad to hear Mr De Mullin is better. The Vicar will be glad too.

HESTER Yes. Doctor Rolt thinks he will do all right now.

BROWN You must have been very anxious when he was first taken ill.

HESTER We were terribly anxious. [*HESTER takes off her hat and cape and puts them down on the window seat.*]

BROWN I suppose there's no doubt it was some sort of stroke?

HESTER Doctor Rolt says no doubt.

BROWN How did it happen?

HESTER We don't know. He had just gone out of the room when we heard a fall. Mother ran out into the hall and found him lying by the door quite unconscious. She was dreadfully frightened. So were we all.

BROWN Had he been complaining of feeling unwell?

HESTER Not especially. He complained of the heat a little. And he had a headache. But Father's not strong, you know. None of the De Mullins are, Aunt Harriet says.

BROWN Mrs Clouston is with you now, isn't she?

HESTER Yes. For a month. She generally stays with us for a month in the summer.

BROWN I suppose she's very fond of Brendon?

HESTER All the De Mullins are fond of Brendon, Mr Brown.

BROWN Naturally. You have been here so long.

HESTER Since the time of King Stephen.

BROWN Not in this house?

HESTER [*Smiling.*] Not in this house, of course. It's not old enough for that.

BROWN Still, it must be very old. The oldest house in the village, isn't it?

HESTER Only about four hundred years. The date is 1603. The mill is older, of course.

BROWN You still own the mill, don't you?

HESTER Yes. Father would never part with it. He thinks everything of the mill. We get our name from it, you know. De Mullin. Du Moulin. "Of the Mill."

BROWN Were the original De Mullin millers then?

HESTER [*rather shocked at such a suggestion*] Oh no!

BROWN I thought they couldn't have been

HESTER No De Mullin has ever been in trade of *any* kind! But in the old days to own a mill was a feudal privilege. Only lords of manors and the great abbeys had them. The farmers had to bring all their corn to them to be ground.

BROWN I see

HESTER There were constant disputes about it all through the Middle Ages

BROWN Why was that?

HESTER The farmers would rather have ground their corn for themselves, I suppose

BROWN Why? If the De Mullins were willing to do it for them?

HESTER They had to pay for having it ground, of course

BROWN [*venturing on a small joke*] Then the De Mullins *were* millers, after all, in a sense

HESTER You mustn't let Father hear you say so!

BROWN The mill is never used now, is it?

HESTER No. When people gave up growing corn round here and all the land was turned into pasture it fell into decay, and now it's almost ruinous

BROWN What a pity!

HESTER Yes. Father says England has never been the same since the repeal of the Corn Laws. [*Enter MRS DE MULLIN and MRS CLOUSTON by the door on the left, followed by DR ROLT*] Here is Mother—and Aunt Harriet

[*MRS DE MULLIN, poor lady, is a crushed, timid creature of fifty-eight or so, entirely dominated by the DE MULLIN fetish and quite unable to hold her own against either her husband or her sister-in-law, a hard-mouthed, resolute woman of sixty. Even HESTER she finds almost too much for her. For the rest a gentle, kindly lady, rather charming in her extreme helplessness. ROLT is the average country doctor, brisk, sensible, neither a fool nor a genius*]

ROLT [*as they enter the room*] He's better. Distinctly better. A little weak and depressed of course. That's only to be expected. Good morning.

[*Shakes hands with HESTER. Nods to BROWN*]

MRS DE MULLIN Mr De Mullin is always nervous about himself.

ROLT Yes. Constitutional, no doubt.

But he'll pick up in a few days. Keep him as quiet as you can. That's really all he needs now.

MRS DE MULLIN You don't think he ought to stay in his room? Good morning, Mr Brown. Are you waiting to see me?

[*BROWN shakes hands with both ladies*]

BROWN [*awkwardly*] Not specially. I walked over from the church with Miss De Mullin.

HESTER Is Father coming downstairs, Mother?

MRS DE MULLIN Yes, Hester. He insisted on getting up. You know he always hates staying in his room.

HESTER Oh, Doctor Rolt, do you think he *should*?

ROLT I don't think it will do him any harm. He can rest quietly in a chair or on the sofa. Well, I must be off. Good-bye, Mrs De Mullin.

[*Shakes hands briskly with every one*]

BROWN [*rising ponderously*] I must be going too. [*Shakes hands with MRS DE MULLIN*] You'll tell Mr De Mullin I inquired after him? Good-bye, Mrs Clouston. [*Shakes hands*] And you're coming to help with Harvest Decorations on Saturday, aren't you, Miss De Mullin?

HESTER [*shaking hands*] Of course.

[*BROWN and ROLT go out*]

MRS CLOUSTON [*seating herself and beginning to knit resolutely*] What singularly unattractive curates the Vicar seems to get hold of, Jane!

MRS DE MULLIN [*meekly*] Do you think so, Harriet?

MRS CLOUSTON Quite remarkably. This Mr Brown, for instance. He has the most enormous feet! And his boots, I've never seen such boots!

HESTER [*flushing*] We needn't sneer if Mr Brown doesn't wear fine clothes, Aunt Harriet.

MRS CLOUSTON Of course not, Hester. Still, I think he goes to the opposite extreme. And he really is quite abnormally plain. Then there was that Mr Snood, who was curate when I was down last year. The man with the very red hands. [*These acid comments are too much for HESTER, who flounces out angrily*]. MRS CLOUSTON looks up for a moment, wondering what is the meaning of this sudden disappearance. Then continues unmoved.] I'm afraid the clergy aren't what they were in our young days, Jane.

MRS DE MULLIN I don't think I've noticed any falling off.

MRS CLOUSTON It is there all the same I'm sure Hugo would agree with me Of course, curates are paid next to nothing Still, I think the Vicar might be more happy in his choice

MRS DE MULLIN I believe the poor like him

MRS CLOUSTON [*to whom this seems of small importance compared with his shocking social disabilities*] Very likely

Do please keep still, Jane, and don't fidget with that book What is the matter with you?

MRS DE MULLIN I'm a little nervous this morning Hugo's illness

MRS CLOUSTON Hugo's almost well now

MRS DE MULLIN Still, the anxiety

MRS CLOUSTON Nonsense, Jane Anxiety is not at all a thing to give way to, especially when there's no longer anything to be anxious about Hugo's practically well now Doctor Rolt seems to have frightened us all quite unnecessarily

MRS DE MULLIN I suppose it's difficult to tell

MRS CLOUSTON Of course it's difficult Otherwise no one would send for a doctor What are doctors for if they can't tell when a case is serious and when it is not?

MRS DE MULLIN But if he didn't know?

MRS CLOUSTON Then he *ought* to have known Next time Hugo is ill you'd better send to Bridport [*MRS DE MULLIN drops book on table with a clatter*] Really, Jane, what are you doing? Throwing books about like that!

MRS DE MULLIN It slipped out of my hand

[*Rises and goes up to window restlessly*]

MRS CLOUSTON Is anything wrong?

MRS DE MULLIN [*hesitating*] Well, the truth is I've done something, Harriet, and now I'm not sure whether I ought to have done it

MRS CLOUSTON Done what?

MRS DE MULLIN [*dolorously*] I'm afraid you won't approve

MRS CLOUSTON Perhaps you'd better tell me what it is Then we shall know

MRS DE MULLIN The fact is some one is coming here this morning, Harriet—to see Hugo

MRS CLOUSTON To see Hugo? Who is it?

MRS DE MULLIN Janet

MRS CLOUSTON [*with horror*] Janet?

MRS DE MULLIN Yes

MRS CLOUSTON Janet! She wouldn't dare!

MRS DE MULLIN [*dolorously*] I sent for her, Harriet

MRS CLOUSTON You sent for her?

MRS DE MULLIN Yes When Hugo was first taken ill and Doctor Rolt seemed to think the attack was so serious

MRS CLOUSTON Doctor Rolt was a fool

MRS DE MULLIN Very likely, Harriet But he said Hugo might die And he said if there was any one Hugo would like to see

MRS CLOUSTON But would Hugo wish to see Janet?

MRS DE MULLIN I thought he might After all, Janet is his daughter

MRS CLOUSTON I thought he said he would never see her again?

MRS DE MULLIN He did say that, of course But that was eight years ago And, of course, he wasn't ill then

MRS CLOUSTON When did you send for her?

MRS DE MULLIN Three days ago

MRS CLOUSTON Why didn't she come then, if she was coming at all?

MRS DE MULLIN She was away from home That was so unfortunate If she had come when Hugo was ill in bed it might have been all right But now that he's almost well again

MRS CLOUSTON When did you hear she was coming?

MRS DE MULLIN Only this morning Here is what she says

[*Produces telegram from pocket*]

MRS CLOUSTON [*reads*] "Telegram delayed Arrive midday Seagrave" Seagrave?

MRS DE MULLIN Yes She calls herself Mrs Seagrave now

MRS CLOUSTON [*nods*] On account of the child, I suppose

MRS DE MULLIN I suppose so

MRS CLOUSTON I never could understand how Janet came to go wrong [*MRS DE MULLIN sighs*] None of the *De Mullins* have ever done such a thing before

MRS DE MULLIN [*plaintively*] I'm sure she doesn't get it from my family

MRS CLOUSTON Well, she must have got it from somewhere She's not in the least like a *De Mullin*

MRS DE MULLIN [*lamentably*] I believe it was all through bicycling

MRS CLOUSTON Bicycling?

MRS DE MULLIN Yes When girls weren't to scour about the country as they do now these things didn't happen

MRS CLOUSTON [*severely*] I never approved of Janet's bicycling, you remember, Jane

MRS DE MULLIN Nor did I, Harriet But it was no use Janet only laughed Janet never would do what she was told about things even when she was quite a child She was so very obstinate She was always getting some idea or other into her head And when she did, nothing would prevent her from carrying it out At one time she wanted to *teach*

MRS CLOUSTON I remember

MRS DE MULLIN She said girls ought to go out and earn their own living like boys

MRS CLOUSTON What nonsense!

MRS DE MULLIN So Hugo said But Janet wouldn't listen Finally we had to let her go over and teach the Aldenham girls French three times a week, just to keep her amused

MRS CLOUSTON [*thoughtfully*] It was strange you never could find out who the father was

MRS DE MULLIN [*sighs*] Yes She wouldn't tell us

MRS CLOUSTON You should have made her tell you Hugo should have insisted on it

MRS DE MULLIN Hugo did insist He was terribly angry with her He sent her to her room and said she was not to come down till she told us But it was no use Janet just stayed in her room till we had all gone to bed and then took the train to London

MRS CLOUSTON You should have locked her door

MRS DE MULLIN We did She got out of the window

MRS CLOUSTON Got out of the window! The girl might have been killed

MRS DE MULLIN Yes But Janet was fond of climbing And she was never afraid of anything

MRS CLOUSTON But there's no late train to London

MRS DE MULLIN She caught the mail at Weymouth, I suppose

MRS CLOUSTON Do you mean to say she *walked* all the way to Weymouth in the middle of the night? Why, it's twelve miles

MRS DE MULLIN She had her bicycle, as I said

MRS CLOUSTON Tck! How did you know she went to London?

MRS DE MULLIN She wrote from there for her things

MRS CLOUSTON I wonder she wasn't ashamed

MRS DE MULLIN So Hugo said However, he said I might send them But he made me send a letter with the things to say that he would have nothing more to do with her and that she was not to write again For a time she didn't write Nearly five months Then, when her baby was born, she wrote to tell me That was how I knew she had taken the name of Seagrave She mentioned it

MRS CLOUSTON Did you show the letter to Hugo?

MRS DE MULLIN Yes

MRS CLOUSTON What did he say?

MRS DE MULLIN Nothing He just read it and gave it back to me without a word

MRS CLOUSTON That's the last you've heard of her, I suppose?

MRS DE MULLIN Oh no, Harriet

MRS CLOUSTON Do you mean to say she goes *on* writing? And you allow her? When Hugo said she was not to?

MRS DE MULLIN [*meekly*] Yes Not often, Harriet Only occasionally

MRS CLOUSTON She has no business to write at all

MRS DE MULLIN Her letters are quite short Sometimes I wish they were longer They really tell one nothing about herself, though I often ask her

MRS CLOUSTON You *ask* her! Then you write too!

MRS DE MULLIN I answer her letters, of course Otherwise she wouldn't go on writing

MRS CLOUSTON Really, Jane, I'm surprised at you So you've actually been corresponding with Janet all these years—and never told *me*! I think you've behaved very badly

MRS DE MULLIN I didn't like to, Harriet

MRS CLOUSTON Didn't like to!

MRS DE MULLIN And as you don't think I *ought* to hear from her

MRS CLOUSTON I don't think you ought to hear from her, of course But as you hear naturally I should like to have seen the letters

MRS DE MULLIN I didn't know that, Harriet In fact, I thought you would rather not When a dreadful thing like this happens in a family it seems best not to write about it or speak of it either, doesn't it? Hugo and I never speak of it

MRS CLOUSTON Does Hugo know you hear from her?

MRS DE MULLIN I think not I have never told him Nor Hester I'm sure Hester would disapprove

MRS CLOUSTON My dear Jane, what can it matter whether Hester approves or not? Hester knows nothing about such things At her age!

MRS DE MULLIN Hester is twenty-eight

MRS CLOUSTON Exactly A girl like that

MRS DE MULLIN [*sighs*] Girls have such very strong opinions nowadays

MRS CLOUSTON What does Janet live on? Teaching?

MRS DE MULLIN I suppose so She had her Aunt Miriam's legacy, of course

MRS CLOUSTON Only four hundred pounds

MRS DE MULLIN Yes

MRS CLOUSTON I never approved of that legacy, Jane Girls oughtn't to have money left them It makes them too independent

MRS DE MULLIN Aunt Miriam was always so fond of Janet

MRS CLOUSTON Then she should have left the money to Hugo Fathers are the proper people to leave money to

MRS DE MULLIN Hugo did have the management of the money—till Janet was twenty-one

MRS CLOUSTON Why only till she was twenty-one?

MRS DE MULLIN It was so in Aunt Miriam's will Of course, Hugo would have gone on managing it for her It was very little trouble as it was all in Consols But Janet said she would rather look after it for herself

MRS CLOUSTON Ridiculous! As if girls could possibly manage money!

MRS DE MULLIN So Hugo said But Janet insisted So she got her way

MRS CLOUSTON What did she do with it? Spend it?

MRS DE MULLIN No Put it into a railway, she said

MRS CLOUSTON A railway! How dangerous!

MRS DE MULLIN She said she would prefer it She said railways sometimes went up Consols never

MRS CLOUSTON She lost it all, of course?

MRS DE MULLIN I don't know, Harriet

MRS CLOUSTON You don't know?

MRS DE MULLIN No I never liked

to ask Hugo was rather hurt about the whole thing, so the subject was never referred to

MRS CLOUSTON Let me see The child must be eight years old by now

MRS DE MULLIN Just eight It will be nine years next March since Janet went away

MRS CLOUSTON What did she call him?

MRS DE MULLIN Johnny

MRS CLOUSTON Johnny! None of the De Mullins have ever been called Johnny

MRS DE MULLIN Perhaps it was his father's name

MRS CLOUSTON Perhaps so

[*Pause*]

MRS DE MULLIN Do you think I ought to tell Hugo about Janet's coming?

MRS CLOUSTON Certainly

MRS DE MULLIN I thought perhaps

MRS CLOUSTON Nonsense, Jane Of course he must be told You ought to have told him from the very beginning

MRS DE MULLIN Do you mean when I sent the telegram? But Hugo was unconscious

MRS CLOUSTON As soon as he recovered consciousness then

MRS DE MULLIN I did mean to But he seemed so weak, and Doctor Rolt said any excitement

MRS CLOUSTON Doctor Rolt!

MRS DE MULLIN [*goaded*] Well, I couldn't tell that Doctor Rolt knew so little about Hugo's illness, could I? And I was afraid of the shock

MRS CLOUSTON Still, he should have been told at once It was the only chance

MRS DE MULLIN Yes, I see that now But I was afraid of the shock, as I said So I put it off And then, when I didn't hear from Janet, I thought I would wait

MRS CLOUSTON Why?

MRS DE MULLIN You see I didn't know whether she was coming And if she didn't come, of course there was no necessity for telling Hugo anything about it I'm afraid he'll be very angry

MRS CLOUSTON At any rate, you must tell him now The sooner the better

MRS DE MULLIN [*meekly*] Very well, Harriet If you think so

MRS CLOUSTON You had better go up to him at once

[*MRS DE MULLIN goes to the door on the left, opens it, then draws back hastily*]

MRS DE MULLIN Here is Hugo He's just coming across the hall With Hester How unlucky

MRS CLOUSTON I don't see that it matters

MRS DE MULLIN I'd rather not have told him before Hester

[MRS CLOUSTON, shrugs her shoulders A moment later HUGO enters He leans on a stick and HESTER'S arm He looks weak and pale and altogether extremely sorry for himself, obviously a nervous and a very tire-some patient]

HESTER Carefully, Father That's right Will you lie on the sofa?

DE MULLIN [fretfully] No, put me in the armchair I'm tired of lying down

HESTER Very well Let me help you There Wait a minute I'll fetch you some pillows

[Props him up on pillows in an arm-chair]

DE MULLIN Thank you

[Lies back exhausted and closes his eyes]

MRS DE MULLIN [going to him] How are you feeling now, Hugo?

DE MULLIN Very weak

MRS DE MULLIN I wonder if you ought to have come down?

DE MULLIN It won't make any difference Nothing will make any difference any more, Jane I sha'n't last much longer I'm worn out

HESTER Father!

DE MULLIN Yes, Hester Worn out [With a sort of melancholy pride] None of the De Mullins have been strong I'm the last of them The last of the De Mullins

MRS CLOUSTON Come, Hugo, you mustn't talk in that morbid way

DE MULLIN I'm not morbid, Harriet But I feel tired, tired

MRS DE MULLIN You'll be better in a day or two

DE MULLIN No, Jane I shall never be better Never in this world [Pause]

MRS DE MULLIN [nervously] Hugo there's something something I have to tell you

DE MULLIN What is it, Jane? [Fretfully] What have you been keeping from me?

MRS DE MULLIN I ought to have told you before Only I didn't like

DE MULLIN Is it something about my illness?

MRS DE MULLIN Oh no, Hugo

DE MULLIN [relieved] I thought Doctor Rolt might have said something

MRS DE MULLIN It's nothing of that kind

DE MULLIN [peevishly] Well, well, what is it?

MRS DE MULLIN Hugo, some one is coming here to-day, to see you

DE MULLIN To see me? Who?

MRS DE MULLIN You won't be angry, Hugo?

DE MULLIN [testily] How can I possibly say that, Jane, when I don't know who it is?

MRS DE MULLIN Hugo, it's [Bell rings loudly] Harriet, there's the bell! I wonder if it's she? Do you think it is?

[All look toward the door on the right expectantly]

DE MULLIN [querulously] Well, Jane? Am I to hear who this visitor is or am I not?

ELLEN [showing in a lady leading a little boy by the hand] Mrs Seagrave

[Enter JANET and JOHNNY JANET is a very handsome woman of six-and-thirty She is admirably dressed, but her clothes are quiet and in excellent taste, dark in color and plain in cut but expensive Her hat is particularly tasteful, but also quiet Her clothes are in marked contrast to those of her mother and sister, which are of the homeliest description and were probably made in the village JOHNNY is a well-grown youngster of eight in a sailor suit]

HESTER [shocked] Mother!

DE MULLIN Janet, my dear!

[Cry of welcome]

JANET Father! [Drops JOHNNY'S hand, comes rapidly to him, falls on one knee and kisses him impulsively, patting his left hand with her right] How are you? Better? [Holding out her left hand to her mother, but still kneeling] How do you do, Mother dear? [MRS DE MULLIN takes it Puts her other hand on JANET'S shoulder] I should have come before, Father, directly you sent for me But your telegram was delayed I was away from home

DE MULLIN [nods] I see

JANET Have you been very ill, Father? And did you frighten them all dreadfully? How naughty of you!

DE MULLIN Silly Janet! Let me look at you, my dear [Looks at her face as she holds it up] You're not much changed, Janet

JANET Nor are you, Father

DE MULLIN A little grayer, perhaps

JANET No! Not a hair!

DE MULLIN Well, my dear, I'm glad you've come. We parted in anger, but that's all over now. Forgotten and forgiven. Eh?

JANET Yes. Forgotten and forgiven. [Rises] How are you, Aunt Harriet? I didn't see you. [Eagerly] Hester!

[Goes to her impulsively, holding out her hand. HESTER takes it coldly. JANET tries to draw her towards her. HESTER resists. She drops her hand and HESTER turns away.]

DE MULLIN Who is that?

[Pointing to JOHNNY]

JANET [turning to him] That is Johnny. My son.

DE MULLIN My grandson?

JANET Yes. I had to bring him, Father. We were away from home and there was no one to leave him with.

DE MULLIN I'm glad you brought him. Come here, Johnny. Don't be afraid.

JOHNNY [in his confident treble] I'm not afraid. Why should I be afraid?

[Goes to him.]

DE MULLIN [taking his hand] Say "How do you do, Grandfather?"

JOHNNY How do you do, Grandfather?

DE MULLIN Will you give me a kiss, Johnny?

JOHNNY If you like, Grandfather.

[Kisses him.]

DE MULLIN That's a good boy.

JANET Kiss your grandmother too, Johnny.

[MRS DE MULLIN snatches him up and kisses him passionately. Then holds him a little way off and looks at him admiringly.]

MRS DE MULLIN What a fine little fellow, Janet!

JANET [proudly] Isn't he, Mother? And so strong and healthy! He's hardly had a day's illness since he was born.

JOHNNY [who has been staring at the pictures on the walls, holding his grandmother by one hand] Who are all these old men, Grandfather?

DE MULLIN Your ancestors, my boy.

JOHNNY What's ancestors?

DE MULLIN Your forefathers. Your mother's forefathers.

JOHNNY Is that old man in a wig an ancestor?

DE MULLIN Yes. That is Anthony De Mullin, your great-great-grandfather.

JOHNNY What was he?

DE MULLIN [puzzled] What was he?

I don't know that he was anything in particular. He was just a gentleman.

JOHNNY [disappointed] Is that all?

DE MULLIN Don't make a mistake, my boy. It's a great thing to be descended from genteel people, a thing to be proud of and to be thankful for.

JOHNNY Mother says that the great thing is for every one to be of some use in the world. Are genteel people of more use in the world than other people, Grandfather?

DE MULLIN Certainly.

JOHNNY And were all these old men genteel people?

DE MULLIN All of them. And you must grow up like them.

JOHNNY They're very ugly, Grandfather. [Pause] What did they do?

DE MULLIN They lived down here at Brendon.

JOHNNY Nothing else?

DE MULLIN They looked after their land.

JOHNNY Had they much land?

DE MULLIN A great deal. At one time the De Mullins owned all the land about here.

JOHNNY How much do they own now?

DE MULLIN [sighs] Not very much, I'm afraid.

JOHNNY Then they can't have looked after it very well, can they, Grandfather?

MRS DE MULLIN [feeling the strain of this conversation] Now, Hugo, do you think you ought to talk any more? Why not go upstairs for a little and lie down?

DE MULLIN Perhaps I will, Jane. I am a little tired.

HESTER Shall I go with Father?

MRS DE MULLIN No. I will. Come, Hugo. [Helps him up.]

DE MULLIN Will you come with me, Johnny?

MRS DE MULLIN [hastily] No, Hugo. He will only disturb you. Stay down here, Johnny, with your mother. Now then. Carefully.

[Leads DE MULLIN off by the door on the left. There is a pause, during which the remaining occupants of the room obviously have nothing in particular to say to each other. At last MRS CLOUSTON speaks.]

MRS CLOUSTON Well, Janet, how have you been all these years?

JANET [nonchalantly] All right, Aunt Harriet. And you?

MRS CLOUSTON Pretty well, thanks.

JANET Are you still living down at Bath?

MRS CLOUSTON Yes You live in London, Jane tells me

JANET Yes

MRS CLOUSTON What do you do there? Teach?

JANET Oh no Why should I be teaching?

MRS CLOUSTON Jane said you wanted to teach at one time

JANET That was years ago Before I left Brendon I soon gave up that idea No I keep a shop

MRS CLOUSTON A shop!

JANET Yes A hat-shop

MRS CLOUSTON Good heavens! A De Mullin in a hat-shop!

JANET [*a little maliciously*] Not a De Mullin, Aunt Harriet A Seagrave

MRS CLOUSTON Did Mr Seagrave keep a hat-shop?

JANET Mr Seagrave? Oh, I see No It's not a man's hat-shop It's a ladies' [*Takes off hat*] This is one of ours What do you think of it, Hester?

HESTER [*frostily*] It looks very expensive

JANET [*looking at it critically*] Yes, I own I'm rather pleased with it

MRS CLOUSTON [*acidly*] You seem to be able to dress very well altogether, in spite of the shop

JANET [*correcting her*] Because of it, Aunt Harriet That's the advantage of being what is called "in trade" If I were a school teacher or a governess or something genteel of that kind I could only afford to dress like a pauper But as I keep a shop I can dress like a lady Clothes are a question of money, after all, aren't they?

MRS CLOUSTON [*contemptuously*] If one is in a shop it doesn't matter how one dresses

JANET On the contrary, if one is in a shop it matters a great deal A girl in a shop must dress well The business demands it If you ever start a hat-shop, Aunt Harriet, you'll have to dress very differently Otherwise nobody will buy your hats

MRS CLOUSTON Indeed? Fortunately I've no intention of starting a shop of any kind

JANET [*blandly*] No? Well, I expect you're wise I doubt if you'd make a success of it [*Loud ring heard off*]

MRS CLOUSTON [*rather flustered, gasps*] Hester! I hope that's not a visitor [*JANET stares Then laughs good-humor- edly AUNT HARRIET'S nervous desire to*

keep her out of the way of visitors strikes her as amusing] What are you laughing at, Janet?

JANET [*shrugs*] Nothing, Aunt Harriet ELLEN [*announces*] Miss Deanes Mr Brown

[*MISS DEANES is a bulky, red-faced, short-sighted woman of forty-two, very fussy and absurd in manner, who talks very fast BROWN carries a book*]

MISS DEANES How do you do, Mrs Clouston? Such a piece of news! I felt I must tell you I brought Mr Brown with me He was just leaving a book for you, Hester, so I made him come in

[*Shakes hands with HESTER*]

BROWN Here it is, Miss De Mullin It's the one you wanted to borrow "Blore on the Creeds"

HESTER Thank you

MISS DEANES [*seeing JANET for the first time*] Janet! Is that you?

JANET Yes, Miss Deanes How are you? [*Shakes hands*]

MISS DEANES Good gracious, child, when did you come? Why, you've not been down to Brendon for years

JANET It is a long time, isn't it?

MISS DEANES And who is this young gentleman?

[*Noticing JOHNNY, who is holding JANET'S hand and staring at MISS DEANES*]

JANET [*calmly*] That is my son Shake hands with Miss Deanes, Johnny

MISS DEANES [*astounded*] Your son! There now! And I never knew you were even married!

JANET [*quite at her ease*] Didn't you?

MISS DEANES No

MRS CLOUSTON [*nervously*] I forgot I haven't introduced you Mr Brown—Mrs Seagrave

BROWN [*bows*] How do you do?

MRS CLOUSTON [*turning to MISS DEANES again*] And now what is your piece of news, Miss Deanes?

MISS DEANES [*volubly*] Oh yes I must tell you You'd never guess Somebody else is engaged to be married [*To JANET*] Who do you think?

JANET I have no idea

MISS DEANES Bertha Aldenham—to Mr Bulstead

JANET [*starts*] Mr Bulstead?

MISS DEANES Yes But I forgot You wouldn't know them They didn't come here until long after you went away They bought Brendon Park from the Malcolms three years ago You remember the Malcolms, Janet?

JANET [*whose attention has wandered*]
 Eh? Oh yes, of course

MRS CLOUSTON Which Mr Bulstead
 is it? The eldest?

MISS DEANES Yes, Montague

JANET [*under her breath*] Monty Bulstead! Engaged!

MRS CLOUSTON Are the Aldenhams pleased?

MISS DEANES Very, I expect The Bulsteads are so rich, you see

JANET Does he live down here, this Mr Montague Bulstead, I mean?

MISS DEANES Oh no He's here on leave He's in the army He only got back three months ago [*With a little giggle*] He and Bertha haven't taken long to settle things, have they?

JANET No, they haven't taken long

MISS DEANES But I dare say he *will* live here when he's married, as the Bulsteads are so rich The father makes frilling and lace and so on All those things people used to make so much better by hand And Bertha may not care about Army life I know I shouldn't [*JANET smiles discreetly*] It's not always very nice, is it?

BROWN [*to JOHNNY, who has been staring at him round-eyed across the room, with heavy geniality*] Well, young man, who are you staring at, eh? Do you want to talk to me?

JOHNNY [*quite simply, in his high piping treble*] No, thank you

JANET Sh! Johnny! You don't mean that Go to Mr Brown when he speaks to you

JOHNNY Very well, Mummie

[*Does so slowly*]

BROWN [*taking his hand*] Now then, what shall we talk about, you and I?

JOHNNY I don't know

BROWN Don't you? Suppose we see if you can say your catechism, then? Would you like that?

JOHNNY What's catechism?

BROWN Come, Johnny, I'm sure your mother has taught you your catechism Can you repeat your "Duty towards your Neighbor"? [*JOHNNY shakes his head emphatically*] Try—"MY duty towards my neighbor"

JOHNNY Mother says it's every one's duty to be healthy and to be happy Is that what you mean?

BROWN [*scandalised*] No! No!

JOHNNY Well, that's what Mother taught me

JANET [*coming to the rescue*] I'm afraid he doesn't know his catechism yet, Mr Brown You see, he's only eight

[*BROWN bows stiffly*] Run away, Johnny, and play in the garden for a little [*Leads him to the door in the bay*]

JOHNNY All right, Mummie

[*JOHNNY runs out into the garden A certain relief is perceptible on his departure It is felt that his interview with MR BROWN has not been a success*]

MISS DEANES [*who feels that a change of subject will be only tactful*] There now, Hester! I do believe you've never asked after Dicky! He'll be so offended!

HESTER [*smiling*] Has Dicky been ill again? I thought you said he was better yesterday

MISS DEANES He was But he had a relapse, poor *darling* I had to sit up all last night with him

JANET What had been the matter with him?

MISS DEANES Some sort of chill, Doctor Rolt said I was *dreadfully* anxious

JANET What a pity! Colds are such troublesome things for children

MISS DEANES [*puzzled*] Children?

JANET Yes You were speaking of a child, weren't you?

MISS DEANES Oh no Dicky is my *cockatoo* He's the *sweetest* bird Talks quite like a human being And never a coarse expression That's so unusual with cockatoos

JANET Indeed?

MISS DEANES Yes The voyage, you see They come all the way from South America, and generally they pick up the most dreadful language, poor lambs—from the sailors But Dicky didn't He has such a pure mind [*Rising*] And now I really must be going I have all kinds of people I want to tell about Mr Bulstead's engagement

[*Shaking hands with MRS CLOUSTON and JANET*]

BROWN I must be off too Wait one moment, Miss Deanes Good-bye, Mrs Clouston [*Shakes hands with MRS CLOUSTON and bows stiffly to JANET* He has not yet forgiven JOHNNY for not knowing his catechism To HESTER] Good-bye, Miss De Mullin Shall I see you at Evensong?

[*Shakes hands with HESTER*]

HESTER I expect so

[*BROWN and MISS DEANES go out*]

JANET Poof!

MRS CLOUSTON Janet!

JANET What a fool Miss Deanes is!

MRS CLOUSTON [*indifferently*] She always was, wasn't she?

JANET I suppose so Going on in that way about a ridiculous cockatoo! And that *hideous* little curate!

HESTER I don't see why you should sneer at all my friends

JANET Are they your friends, Hester? Then I won't sneer at them But you can't call Mr Brown *handsome*, can you?

HESTER Mr Brown is a very good man and works very hard among the poor That's better than handsome

JANET Yes But less agreeable, isn't it? However, if you like him there's an end of it But he needn't have begun asking Johnny his catechism the very first time he met him I don't call it good manners

HESTER How was he to know the poor child was being brought up to be a little heathen?

[*Takes up her hat and cape and begins putting them on*]

JANET [*shrugs*] How, indeed!

MRS CLOUSTON Are you going out, Hester? Lunch will be ready in half an hour

HESTER Only to take Mrs Wason her soup, Aunt Harriet

JANET [*looking curiously at HESTER*] Do you want to marry Mr Brown, Hester?

MRS CLOUSTON My dear Janet!

JANET Well, Aunt Harriet, there's nothing to be ashamed of if she does Do you, Hester?

HESTER Why do you ask such a question?

JANET Never mind Only answer it [*Pause*] You do like him, don't you?

HESTER I've a great respect for Mr Brown

JANET Don't blush, my dear I dare say that's much the same thing

HESTER I won't talk to you about it You only sneer

JANET I wasn't sneering Come, Hester, don't be cross Why shouldn't we be friends? I might help you

HESTER How could you help me?

JANET [*looking quizzically at poor HESTER'S head gear*] I might make you a hat, my dear

HESTER Mr Brown doesn't notice those things, Hester

JANET All men notice those things, Hester

HESTER [*with a sneer*] I suppose that's why you wear such fine clothes

JANET [*quite good-humored*] That's it Fine feathers make fine birds

HESTER Well, I call it shameless

JANET My dear Hester, you're always

being ashamed of things You always were I remember What is there to be ashamed of in that? What on earth were women given pretty faces and pretty figures for if not make men admire them and want to marry them?

HESTER [*acidly*] Well, your plan hasn't been very successful so far, anyhow!

JANET [*quietly*] Nor has yours, Hester [*HESTER makes exclamation of impatience and seems about to reply angrily Then thinks better of it and goes out without a word JANET follows her retreat with her eyes and smiles half-cynically, half-compassionately The curtain falls*]

ACT II

SCENE—On the edge of Brendon Forest Time, three days later A road runs along the back of the stage, from which it is separated by a fence and high hedge In this but somewhat to the right is a stile and also a gate Round the trunk of a large tree to the left is a rough wooden seat The stage is empty when the curtain rises Then enter MRS DE MULLIN, JANET and JOHNNY They approach stile from the left and come through gate There is an exit on the right of the stage through the Forest

JANET I don't think I'll come any farther, Mother

MRS DE MULLIN You won't come up to the house?

JANET No, thanks [*Rather grimly*] I don't want to see Mrs Bulstead And I'm sure Mrs Bulstead doesn't want to see me

MRS DE MULLIN I wish Hester could have come

JANET Why couldn't she?

MRS DE MULLIN She's at the church putting up decorations It's the Harvest Thanksgiving to-morrow

JANET [*laughing*] Mr Brown!

MRS DE MULLIN Janet, I told you you weren't to laugh at Hester about Mr Brown It's not kind

JANET [*lightly*] It's all right, Mother Hester's not here

MRS DE MULLIN Still, I don't like it, dear It's not quite

JANET [*soothing her*] Not quite nice I know, Mother Not the way really refined and ladylike young women talk But I'm only quite a common person who sells

hats You can't expect all these refinements from me!

[MRS DE MULLIN sighs]

MRS DE MULLIN Are you going to turn back?

JANET Not at once I'll wait for you here a little with Johnny, in case they're out. Why, they've put a seat here

[She sits on the side farthest from the road]

MRS DE MULLIN Usen't there to be one?

JANET No Nor a gate in my time Only a stile

MRS DE MULLIN Very likely, dear I don't remember I don't often come this way

JANET [nods] I often used to come along it in the old days

MRS DE MULLIN I dare say Well, I must be getting on to my call or I shall be late You're sure you won't come?

JANET Quite, Mother Good-bye

[MRS DE MULLIN goes off through the forest]

JOHNNY Where's Grandmother going, Mummie?

JANET Up to the big house

JOHNNY What big house?

JANET Brendon Park

JOHNNY Mayn't I go up to the big house too?

JANET No, dear You're to stay with Mother

JOHNNY Who lives at the big house?

JANET Nobody you know, dear

JOHNNY That's why I asked, Mummie

JANET Well, don't ask any more, Sonny Mother's rather tired Run away and play, there's a good boy

[Kisses him]

JOHNNY Very well, Mummie

[JOHNNY disappears into the wood]

JANET falls into a brown study Presently a footstep is heard coming along the road, but she seems to notice nothing Then a young man climbs over the stile He starts as he sees her and draws back, then advances eagerly, holding out his hand]

JANET Monty!

MONTY Janet! Is that you?

JANET [smiling] Yes, Monty

MONTY [astounded] Janet! Here!

JANET Yes, Monty

MONTY [nodding over his shoulder]

Our stile, Janet!

JANET Our stile

MONTY [nods] The stile where you and I first met

JANET [relapsing for a moment into

something like sentiment] Yes, I thought I must see it again—for the sake of old times

MONTY How long ago it all seems!

JANET [matter-of-fact] It is a longish time, you know

MONTY [thoughtfully] I believe that was the happiest month of my life, Janet

JANET Was it, Monty?

MONTY Yes [Pause] I say, when did you come down? You don't live at home any longer, do you?

JANET No I came down only three days ago

MONTY By Jove, it is good to see you again! Why, it's eight years since we used to be together, you and I

JANET Nearly nine

MONTY Yes You're not coming to live down here again, are you?

JANET No Why?

MONTY I thought perhaps

JANET [cynically] Would you dislike it very much if I did, Monty?

MONTY Of course not

JANET Confess You *did* feel it would be rather awkward?

MONTY Well, of course

JANET However, you can set your mind at rest I'm not

[His relief at this intelligence enables him to realize the pleasure he is getting from seeing her again]

MONTY I say, Janet, how well you're looking! I believe you're handsomer than ever

JANET [smiling] Am I?

MONTY You know you are

[Pause He looks at her admiringly She turns away with a little smile]

JANET [feeling that they are getting on dangerous ground] Well, Monty, where have you been these eight years?

MONTY Abroad with my regiment We've been ordered all over the place I've been home on leave, of course But not for the last three years Not since Father bought the Park I've never been at Brendon since [Pause]

JANET Since we were here? Don't blush Monty [He nods shamefacedly] How did he come to buy the place?

MONTY It was just a chance He saw it advertised, came and looked at it, and bought it He's no idea I was ever at Brendon before [Rather bitter laugh] None of them have I have to pretend not to know my way about

JANET Why?

MONTY It seems safer [JANET nods] Sometimes I almost forget to keep it up

I'm such a duffer about things But I've managed hitherto And now, of course, it's all right, as I've been here three months I may be supposed to know the beastly place by this time

JANET Beastly! You're not very polite

[MONTY laughs shamefacedly]

MONTY You got my note, didn't you?

JANET What note? Oh, eight years ago, you mean? Yes

MONTY I left it with the woman at the lodgings As you were coming over that afternoon, I thought it safer than sending a message And of course I daren't telegraph [JANET nods] I was awfully sick at having to go away like that All in a moment Without even saying good-bye But I had to

JANET Of course Was your mother badly hurt?

MONTY No Only stunned That was such rot If people get chucked out of a carriage they must expect to get stunned But of course they couldn't know The telegram just said, "Mother hurt Carriage accident Come at once" It got to me at the lodgings a couple of hours before you were coming I just had time to chuck my things into a bag and catch the train I wanted to come back after the mater was all right again But I couldn't very well, could I?

JANET Why not?

MONTY Well, the regiment was to sail in less than three weeks, and the mater would have thought it rather rough if I had gone away again I'd been away six weeks as it was

JANET Oh yes Of course

MONTY [with half a sigh] To think if I hadn't happened to be riding along that road and seen you at the stile and asked my way, you and I might never have met What a chance life is!

JANET [nods] Just a chance [Pause]

MONTY Why did you go away, Janet? You weren't going the last time I saw you

JANET Wasn't I?

MONTY No At least you said nothing about it

JANET I didn't know I was going then Not for certain

MONTY Why did you go?

JANET [quietly] I had to, Monty

MONTY [puzzled] You had to? [JANET nods] But why?

JANET Mother found out

MONTY About us?

JANET Yes And she told Father

MONTY [genuinely distressed] Oh, Janet, I'm so sorry!

JANET [shrugs] It couldn't be helped

MONTY Does he know who it was?

JANET Who you were? No

MONTY You didn't tell him?

JANET Monty! As if I should

MONTY I don't know Girls generally do

JANET I didn't

MONTY No I suppose you wouldn't But you're different from most girls Do you know there was always something rather splendid about you, Janet?

JANET [curtsies] Thank you

MONTY I wonder he didn't make you tell

JANET He did try, of course That was why I ran away

MONTY I see Where did you go?

JANET London

MONTY To London? All alone?

[JANET nods] Why did you do that? And why didn't you let me know?

JANET [shrugs] You were out of England by that time

MONTY But why London?

JANET I had to go somewhere And it seemed better to go where I shouldn't be known Besides, it's easier to be lost sight of in a crowd

MONTY But what did you do when you got there?

JANET [calmly] I got a place in a shop, Monty

MONTY A shop? You!

JANET Yes, a hat-shop, in Regent Street My dear Monty, don't gape like that Hat-shops are perfectly respectable places Almost too respectable to judge by the fuss two of them made about employing me

MONTY What do you mean?

JANET Well, when I applied to them for work they naturally asked if I had ever worked in a hat-shop before And when I said "No" they naturally asked why I wanted to begin In the innocence of my heart I told them Whereupon they at once refused to employ me—not in the politest terms

MONTY Poor Janet What beastly luck! Still [Hesitates]

JANET Yes, Monty

MONTY I mean, naturally they couldn't be expected

JANET Monty!

MONTY [flustered] At least I don't mean that exactly Only [Stops]

JANET My dear Monty, I quite understand what you mean You needn't trouble to be explicit Naturally they couldn't be expected to employ an abandoned person

like me to trim hats That was exactly their view

MONTY But I thought you said you *did* get a job in a shop?

JANET Yes, but not in one of *those* shops They were *far* too virtuous

MONTY How did you do it?

JANET Told lies, Monty I believe that's how most women get employment

MONTY Told lies?

JANET Yes I invented a husband, recently deceased, bought several yards of crape and a wedding ring This is the ring

[*Takes off glove*]

MONTY Oh, Janet, how beastly for you! [*JANET shrugs*]

JANET [*laughing*] Everything seems to be "beastly" to you, Monty Brendon and telling lies and lots of other things Luckily I'm less superfire

MONTY Didn't they find out?

JANET No That was why I decided to be a widow It made inquiries more difficult

MONTY I should have thought it made them easier

JANET On the contrary You can't cross-question a widow about a recent bereavement If you do she cries I always used to look tearful directly my husband's name was mentioned So they gave up mentioning it Women are so boring when they will cry

MONTY They might have inquired from other people

JANET Why should they? Besides there was no one to inquire from I called him Seagrave—and drowned him at sea You can't ask questions of the sharks

MONTY Oh, Janet, how can you joke about it?

JANET I couldn't—then I wanted work too badly But I can now—with your kind permission, I mean

MONTY And have you been in the shop ever since?

JANET Not *that* shop I was only there about six months—till baby was born, in fact

MONTY [*horrified*] Janet, there was a baby!

JANET Of course there was a baby

MONTY Oh, Janet! And you never wrote! Why didn't you write?

JANET I did think of it But on the whole I thought I wouldn't It would have been no good

MONTY No good?

JANET Not then You were in India I was in England

MONTY You ought to have written at once—directly your mother found out

JANET One week after you sailed, Monty? [*Defiantly*] Besides, why should I write?

MONTY Why? I could have married you, of course

JANET If I'd asked you, you mean? Thank you, my dear Monty

MONTY No, I don't Of course I should have married you I *must* have married you

JANET [*looking at him thoughtfully*] I wonder if you would

MONTY Certainly I should I should have been bound in honor

JANET I see Then I'm glad I never wrote

MONTY You're glad? Now?

JANET Yes I've done some foolish things in my life, Monty, but none so foolish as that To marry a schoolboy, not because he loves you or wants to marry you but because he thinks he's "bound in honor" No, thank you

MONTY I don't mean that You know I don't, Janet I loved you, of course That goes without saying I'd have married you like a shot before, only the Governor would have made such a fuss The Governor was so strait-laced about this sort of thing When I was sent away from Eton he made the most ghastly fuss

JANET Were you sent away from Eton for "this sort of thing"?

MONTY Yes—at least I don't mean that either But it was about a girl there He was frightfully wild He threatened to cut me off if I ever did such a thing again Such rot! As if no one had ever been sent away from school before!

JANET [*reflectively*] I didn't know you had been sent away from Eton

MONTY Didn't you? I suppose I didn't like to tell you for fear of what you'd think [*bitterly*] I seem to have been afraid of everything in those days

JANET Not *everything*, Monty

MONTY Oh, you know what I mean I was awfully afraid of the Governor, I remember I suppose all boys are if their parents rag them too much But I would have married you, Janet, if I had known I would honestly

JANET [*blandly*] What is the pay of a British subaltern, Monty?

MONTY The Governor would have had to stump up, of course

JANET Poor Mr Bulstead! He'd have *liked* that, I suppose? And what about

your poor unhappy colonel? And all the other little subalterns?

MONTY [*obstinately*] Still, you ought to have written

JANET [*quietly*] You never wrote

MONTY I couldn't You know that You never would let me That was why I couldn't send that note to tell you that I was going away You said my letters would be noticed

JANET Yes I forgot that That's the result of having a father who is what is called old-fashioned

MONTY What do you mean?

JANET All letters to the Manor House are delivered locked in a bag They always have been since the Flood, I believe, or at least since the invention of the postal service And of course Father won't have it altered So every morning there's the ritual of unlocking this absurd bag No one is allowed to do that but Father—unless he's ill Then Mother has the privilege And of course he scrutinizes the outside of every letter and directly it's opened asks who it's from and what's inside it Your letters would have been noticed at once

MONTY How beastly!

JANET The penalty of having nothing to do, Monty

MONTY I know What a mess the whole thing is!

JANET Just so No There was no way out of it except the hat-shop

MONTY [*remorsefully*] It's awfully rough on you, Janet

JANET Never mind I dare say I wasn't cut out for the wife of a subaltern, Monty, whereas I make excellent hats

MONTY [*savagely*] You're still making the damned things?

JANET Yes Only at another shop The Regent Street place had no room for me when I was well enough to go back to work But the woman who kept it gave me a recommendation to a friend who was starting up in Hanover Street A most superior quarter for a hat-shop, Monty In fact the superior quarter Claude et Cie was the name

MONTY [*rather shocked*] A French shop?

JANET No more French than you are, Monty It was kept by a Miss Hicks, one of the most thoroughly British people you can imagine But we called ourselves Claude et Cie in order to be able to charge people more for their hats You can always charge fashionable women more for their clothes if you pretend to be French It's one of the imbecilities of commerce So

poor dear Miss Hicks became Madame Claude and none of our hats cost less than seven guineas

MONTY Do people buy hats at such a price?

JANET Oh yes Everybody in Society bought them Claude et Cie was quite the rage that season Nobody who was any body went anywhere else

MONTY She must have made a great deal of money

JANET On the contrary She made nothing at all and narrowly escaped bankruptcy

MONTY But I don't understand If her hats were so dear and everybody bought them?

JANET Everybody *bought* them but nobody *paid* for them In the highest circles, I believe, people never do pay for anything—certainly not for their clothes At least, nobody paid Miss Hicks, and at the end of six months she owed £1,200 and hadn't a penny to pay her rent

MONTY Why didn't she *make* them pay?

JANET She did dun them, of course, but they only ordered more hats to keep her quiet, which didn't help matters much And when she went on dunning them they said they would withdraw their custom In fact, she was in a dilemma If she let her bills run on she couldn't pay her rent And if she asked her customers to pay their bills they ceased to be customers

MONTY How beastly!

JANET Not again, Monty?

MONTY What *did* she do?

JANET She didn't do anything She was too depressed She used to sit in the back room where the hats were trummed and weep over the materials, regardless of expense Finally things came to a crisis The landlord threatened to distrain for his rent But just as it looked as if it was all over with Claude et Cie a capitalist came to the rescue I was the capitalist

MONTY You?

JANET Yes I'd an old aunt once who was fond of me and left me a legacy when I was seventeen Four hundred pounds

MONTY That wouldn't go very far

JANET Four hundred pounds goes a longish way towards setting up a shop Besides, it was nearly five hundred by that time My shares had gone up Well, I and my five hundred pounds came to the rescue I paid the rent and the most clamorous of the creditors, and Miss Hicks and I became partners

MONTY But what was the good of that if the business was worth nothing?

JANET It was worth several hundred pounds to any one who had the pluck to sue half the British aristocracy I sued them It was tremendous fun They were simply furious They talked as if they'd never been sued before! As for Miss Hicks, she wept more than ever and said I'd ruined the business

MONTY Hadn't you?

JANET That business Yes But with the £1,200—or as much of it as we could recover—we started a new one A cheap hat-shop Relatively cheap that is—for Hanover Street We charged two guineas a hat instead of seven, 100 per cent profit instead of You can work it out for yourself But then our terms were strictly cash, so we made no bad debts That was my idea

MONTY But you said nobody ever paid for their hats

JANET Not in the highest social circles But we drew our customers from the middle classes who live in South Kensington and Bayswater, and are not too haughty to pay for a hat if they see a cheap one

MONTY But wasn't it a frightful risk?

JANET [cheerfully] It was a risk, of course But everything in life is a risk, isn't it? And it succeeded, as I felt sure it would We're quite a prosperous concern nowadays, and I go over to Paris four times a year to see the latest fashions That, my dear Monty, is the history of Claude et Cie

[Pause]

MONTY And you've never married, Janet?

JANET No

MONTY [hesitates] Janet is it because?

JANET Because?

MONTY Because you still care for me?

JANET Monty, don't be vain

MONTY [repelled] I didn't mean it like that Janet, don't laugh Of course, I'm glad if you don't care any more At least, I suppose I ought to be glad It would have been dreadful if you had gone on caring all these years and I not known But did you?

JANET No, Monty You may set your mind at rest I didn't

MONTY You're sure?

JANET Quite I had too many other things to think of

MONTY Do you mean that beastly shop?

JANET [quietly] I meant my baby

MONTY Our baby Is it alive?

JANET Of course What do you mean, Monty?

MONTY I thought, as you didn't say

[Thoughtfully] Poor little beast!

[JANET makes gesture of protest] Well, it's rough luck on the little beggar, isn't it? What's become of him, Janet?

JANET What's become of him? He's quite alive, as I said, particularly thriving

MONTY Do you mean he's living with you? But, of course, I forgot, you're supposed to be married

JANET [correcting him] A widow, Monty An inconsolable widow!

MONTY Where is he? In London?

JANET No As a matter of fact he's probably not fifty yards away Over there

[Points toward the wood]

MONTY [jumping up] Janet!

[Nervously looking round]

JANET [rallying him] Frightened, Monty?

MONTY Of course not [Shamefacedly]

JANET Just a little?

MONTY [regaining courage] Janet, let me see him

JANET [amused] Would you like to?

MONTY Of course I should He's my baby as well as yours, if it comes to that Do call him, Janet

JANET All right [Calls] Johnny!

[Pause] John—ny! [To Monty] You mustn't tell him, you know

MONTY Of course not

JOHNNY [off] Yes, Mummie

JANET Come here for a minute Mother wants to speak to you

JOHNNY [off] Very well, Mummie

[Enters] Oh, Mummie, I've found such a lot of rabbits You must come and see them [Seeing MONTY for the first time, stares at him] Oh!

MONTY Come here, youngster Come and let me look at you [JOHNNY goes to him slowly MONTY, grasping both hands, draws him to him, looking at him long and keenly] He's like you, Janet

JANET Is he?

MONTY Yes He has your eyes So your name's Johnny, young man?

JOHNNY Yes

MONTY Well, Johnny, will you give me a kiss? [MONTY leans forward He does so] That's right

JOHNNY And now, Mummie, come and look at my rabbits

JANET Not yet, dear Mother's busy just now

JOHNNY May I go back to them, then?

JANET Yes

MONTY Suppose I won't let you go?

JOHNNY I'll make you—and so will Mummie

MONTY Plucky little chap Off with you

[*Kisses him again, then releases his hands*
JOHNNY *trots off again* MONTY
follows him with his eyes Pause]

JANET Well, Monty, what do you think of him?

MONTY [*enthusiastic*] I think he's splendid

JANET [*proudly*] Isn't he? And such a sturdy little boy He weighed ten pounds before he was a month old

MONTY [*shyly*] I say, Janet

JANET Yes?

MONTY [*hesitates*] You'll let me kiss you once more, won't you? For the last time? [*She hesitates*] You don't mind?

JANET [*heartily*] Of course not, Monty You're not married yet, you know

MONTY Janet! My dear, dear Janet!

[*Seizes her and kisses her fiercely*]

JANET [*releasing herself gently*] That's enough, Monty

MONTY [*remorsefully*] I'm afraid I behaved like an awful brute to you, Janet

JANET [*lightly*] Oh, no

MONTY Yes, I did I ought to have married you I ought to marry you still On account of the boy

JANET [*quite matter-of-fact*] Oh, well, you can't do that now in any case, can you—as you're engaged to Bertha Aldenham?

MONTY You've heard about that? Who told you?

JANET A worthy lady called Miss Deanes

MONTY I know A regular sickener

JANET My dear Monty!

MONTY Sorry

JANET She brought the good news The very day I arrived as it happened We've hardly talked of anything else at the Manor House since—except Father's illness, of course

MONTY Why?

JANET What else is there to talk about—in Brendon?

MONTY That's true Isn't it [*Stops himself, looks at watch* Whistles] Whew! [*Rises*]

JANET What it is, Monty?

MONTY I say, Janet, I wonder if you'd mind going now?

JANET Why? [*She rises too*]

MONTY [*awkwardly*] Well, the fact is I'm expecting some one here directly I

JANET Bertha?

MONTY Yes I was to meet her here at the stile at six

JANET *Our* stile, Monty?

MONTY Yes You don't mind, do you—about my asking you to go, I mean?

JANET [*sitting again*] Not in the least

MONTY But you're not going?

JANET Why should I go?

MONTY Oh, well, I thought

JANET That it wouldn't be quite suitable for us to meet?

MONTY I didn't mean that, of course But I thought you mightn't like—I mean it might be painful [*Sits again*]

JANET For me to see her? On the contrary, I'm dying to see her

MONTY Janet, sometimes I think you're not quite human

JANET My dear boy, I'm extremely human—and therefore curious [*Pause*] What's she like, Monty? Now, I mean She promised to be pretty

MONTY She is pretty, I suppose [*Pause*] I wonder if Bertha and I will ever have a son like Johnny!

JANET Let's hope so, Monty For Bertha's sake

MONTY Isn't that some one coming? [*Pause, listens*] I expect it's she [*Rising hastily and advancing towards stile*] Is that you, Bertha?

BERTHA [*at stile*] Oh! There you are Yes Isn't it hot? [*Entering the gate, which he opens for her*] Am I punctual? [*With a cry*] Janet! When did you come home?

[*Goes to her eagerly*]

JANET [*shaking hands*] Only three days ago [*BERTHA kisses her*]

BERTHA Only three days! And you've never been up to see us

JANET I know But with father ill

BERTHA Of course I understand I was only joking How is Mr De Mullin?

JANET Much better Not well yet, of course But he gets stronger every day

BERTHA I'm so glad I say, Janet, do you remember when you used to teach us French?

JANET Yes

BERTHA I was awfully troublesome, I remember

MONTY I expect you were an awful duffer at it, too, Bertha

BERTHA What cheek!

MONTY Wasn't she, Ja—[*pulls himself up*]—Miss De Mullin?

[*JANET smiles nervously*]

BERTHA I didn't know you'd met Janet, Monty?

MONTY Oh, yes

BERTHA Why didn't you tell us?

[*Quite unsuspecting of anything wrong
Merely curious*]

MONTY It was some time ago

BERTHA [*surprised*] Not at Brendon? You've never been at Brendon before

MONTY No It was at Weymouth I was there getting over typhoid years ago

BERTHA I remember, you told me Eight or nine years ago, wasn't it?

MONTY Yes [*Looks at watch*] I say, Bertha, we must be off if we're not to be late

BERTHA Give me two minutes to rest The weather's simply stifling

MONTY Rot! It's quite cool

BERTHA Then you must have been sitting here a long time I've been walking along a dusty road and I'm not going to start yet Besides, I want to know all about you two meeting Were you staying at Weymouth, Janet?

JANET Oh, no I just bicycled over Mr Bulstead ran into me

MONTY I like that She ran into me

JANET Anyhow, my front wheel buckled and he had to help me to put it right

BERTHA What gallantry!

MONTY It was The beastly thing took about half an hour By the time it was over we seemed to have known each other for a lifetime [*Looks at watch*] Two minutes is up Time to start, Bertha

BERTHA It isn't

MONTY It is You'll be late dressing to a certainty if you don't go

BERTHA I like that I can dress as quickly as you if it comes to that

MONTY Oh, no I can dress in ten minutes I'll give you a quarter of an hour's start and be down in the drawing-room five minutes before you're ready Is it a bet?

BERTHA Done In sixpences [*To JANET*] I'm staying at the Park for a few days longer, Janet Come up and see me, won't you?

JANET [*uncomfortably*] I'm afraid I can't promise On account of Father

BERTHA Well, after I've gone home then Mother will want to see you And so will Helen And now, I suppose, I really must go Come along, Monty

MONTY Not I I needn't go for a quarter of an hour You have a quarter of an hour's start

BERTHA All right Good-bye, Janet [*Kisses her*] You won't forget about coming as soon as you can? I go back home on Thursday

JANET I won't forget [*BERTHA goes*

off through the wood JANET watches her go, and there is a pause] Yes, she is pretty, Monty Very pretty

MONTY [*nods*] You don't mind?

JANET Her being pretty? Of course not It's a justification

MONTY A justification?

JANET For forgetting me

MONTY [*impulsively, seizing her hands*] Janet, I've never done that You know I haven't

JANET [*drawing back*] No, Monty Not again [*Pause*]

MONTY I say, I as nearly as possible called you Janet right out before Bertha

JANET So I saw You did call me Miss De Mullin, by the way—which wasn't very clever of you

MONTY Did I? What an ass I am! But I don't suppose she noticed

JANET I dare say not [*A shrill cry comes from the wood on the right Then silence JANET starts up*] What was that?

MONTY I don't know

JANET It sounded like a child Where did it come from? Over here, didn't it?

MONTY I think so

JANET [*alarmed*] I hope Johnny I must go and see [*A moment later JOHNNY runs in sobbing, followed by MRS DE MULLIN and BERTHA*] Johnny! What is it, my sweetheart?

[*Runs to him*]

JOHNNY Oh, Mummie, Mummie, I was running after rabbits and I tripped over some nettles and they stung me

MRS DE MULLIN He put his foot in a hole, Janet He fell just as I met Bertha [*Shakes hands with MONTY*] How do you do, Mr Bulstead?

JANET There! There! my pet Did it hurt very much? Mother shall kiss it and make it well [*Does so*]

JOHNNY [*sobs*] Oh-h-h—

BERTHA Is he your son?

JANET Yes Don't cry any more, dear Brave boys don't cry, you know

JOHNNY [*gasps*] It h-hurts so

JANET I know But crying won't make it hurt less, will it? So you must dry your eyes Come now

JOHNNY All right, Mummie

[*Still sobs gradually*]

BERTHA [*astonished*] I'd no idea you were married, Janet

JANET Hadn't you?

BERTHA No When was it?

JANET Eight years ago Nearly nine To Mr Seagrave

BERTHA Is he down here with you?

JANET No My husband died soon after our marriage

BERTHA Poor Janet I'm so sorry
[Pause] And it was before your marriage that Monty met you?

JANET How do you know?

BERTHA [*quite unsuspecting*] He called you Miss De Mullin

JANET Of course

MRS DE MULLIN [*pricking up her ears suspiciously at this*] I didn't know you had met my daughter before, Mr Bulstead

BERTHA Nor did I They met down at Weymouth quite by chance eight or nine years ago

MRS DE MULLIN [*gravely*] Indeed?

MONTY Yes I say, Bertha, excuse my interrupting you, but we really must be off now if we're not to be late

BERTHA You want to win that bet!

MONTY The bet's off There's no time to give you any start I must come, too, or I shan't be in time myself, and the Governor will simply curse

BERTHA Is Mr Bulstead *very* fierce if people are late for dinner?

MONTY Simply beastly

BERTHA How very unpleasant! I wonder if I'm wise to marry into the family?

[*Shaking hands with MRS DE MULLIN and JANET Then goes off laughing merrily*]

MONTY [*sardonically*] I wonder [*Shakes hands with MRS DE MULLIN and JANET*] Will you give me a kiss, old chap?

[*To JOHNNY*]

JOHNNY That's three times

[*MONTY nods MONTY follows*]

BERTHA off A long pause

MRS DE MULLIN looks fixedly at JANET

JANET looks at the ground

MRS DE MULLIN [*slowly*] Mr Montague Bulstead seems unusually fond of children, Janet

JANET Does he, Mother?

[*She does not look up*]

MRS DE MULLIN Yes Johnny is rather old to be kissed by strangers

JANET I suppose he kissed him because he was brave about being stung

MRS DE MULLIN He seems to have kissed him before Twice

JANET I dare say I didn't notice

MRS DE MULLIN Johnny did, apparently

JANET Well, it doesn't matter anyway, does it? [*Looks up defiantly Meets her mother's eye full on her*] Why do you look at me like that, Mother?

MRS DE MULLIN Send Johnny away for a little, Janet I want to speak to you
JANET I'd rather not, Mother He might hurt himself again

MRS DE MULLIN He will be quite safe Run away, Johnny But don't go too far

JOHNNY All right, Grandmother

[*JOHNNY trots off into the wood*]
[Pause]

JANET [*defiantly*] Well, Mother?

MRS DE MULLIN Janet, why did you never tell us you had met Mr Bulstead before?

JANET When?

MRS DE MULLIN Any time during the last three days when we were speaking of his engagement

JANET I'd forgotten all about it, Mother

MRS DE MULLIN Indeed? And why didn't you tell us eight years ago, when you met him at Weymouth, when you were still "Miss De Mullin"?

JANET Mother, don't badger me like this If you want to ask me anything ask it

MRS DE MULLIN Janet, Mr Bulstead is Johnny's father

JANET Mr Bulstead? Absurd!

MRS DE MULLIN Then why did you pretend not to have met him? Why did you conceal the fact of your meeting him from us eight years ago? And why has he concealed the fact from Bertha and the Bulsteads?
[Pause]

JANET [*resignedly*] Very well, Mother, if you're determined to know you must know Yes, he's Johnny's father

MRS DE MULLIN Oh, Janet!

JANET [*irritably*] Well, Mother, if you didn't want to know you shouldn't have asked I told you not to worry me [*MRS DE MULLIN begins to cry Remorsefully*] There, there, Mother! Don't cry I'm sorry I was cross to you Don't let's talk any more about it

MRS DE MULLIN [*snuffling*] No, Janet, we *must* talk about it There's no use trying to hide things any longer You must tell me the truth

JANET Much better not, Mother It won't give you any pleasure to hear

MRS DE MULLIN Still, I'd rather know, Janet

JANET [*shrugs*] As you please What do you want me to tell you?

MRS DE MULLIN Everything How did you come to be at Weymouth? I don't remember you staying at Weymouth eight years ago

JANET I wasn't staying there But Monty was

MRS DE MULLIN [*shocked*] Monty!

JANET Mr Bulstead Oh, what *does* it matter now? He'd had typhoid and was there to recruit I'd ridden over on my bicycle

MRS DE MULLIN [*lamentably*] Bicycle! I always said it was all through bicycling

JANET [*another shrug*] He ran into me, or I ran into him I was rather shaken, and he asked me to come in and rest It happened close to the house where he was lodging

MRS DE MULLIN You went in! To his lodging! A man you had never met before!

JANET My dear Mother, when you have been thrown off a bicycle, ordinary conventions cease to apply Besides, as a matter of fact, we *had* met once before—the day before, in fact

MRS DE MULLIN Where?

JANET Here By this very stile Monty was riding past and he asked me the way to somewhere—Thoresby, I think I was standing by the stile Next day I happened to ride to Weymouth We collided—and the rest you know

MRS DE MULLIN [*sternly*] Were those the *only* times you met him, Janet?

JANET Of course not, Mother After Weymouth collision we met constantly, nearly every day We used to meet out riding, and I had tea with him lots of times in his rooms

MRS DE MULLIN [*horrified*] How long did this go on?

JANET More than a month—till he left Weymouth, in fact Now, Mother, is that all you want to know? Because if so, we'll drop the subject

MRS DE MULLIN Oh, Janet, what *will* your father say?

JANET Father? He won't know

MRS DE MULLIN Won't know? But I must tell him

JANET Good heavens! Why?

MRS DE MULLIN In order that Mr Bulstead may marry you, of course Your father will insist on his marrying you

JANET If Father attempts to do that, Mother, I shall deny the whole story And Monty will back me up

MRS DE MULLIN He would never be so wicked

JANET He would have to if I ask him It's the least he could do

MRS DE MULLIN Johnny is there to prove it

JANET There's nothing to prove that Monty is Johnny's father Nothing whatever

MRS DE MULLIN But, Janet, *why* won't you marry him?

JANET [*impatiently*] My dear Mother, because I don't want to, of course

MRS DE MULLIN You don't *want* to?

JANET Great heavens, no! Why should I? Monty Bulstead isn't at all the sort of man I shou'd care to *marry*

MRS DE MULLIN Why not?

JANET Frankly, Mother, because he's not interesting enough Monty's a very nice fellow and I like him very much, but I don't want to pass the remainder of my life with him If I'm to marry anybody—and I don't think I shall—it will have to be a rather more remarkable person than Monty Bulstead

MRS DE MULLIN Yet you *did* love him, Janet You must have loved him then

JANET Oh, yes Then But that was ages ago, before Johnny was born After that I didn't care for anybody any more except Johnny

MRS DE MULLIN But, Janet, you *ought* to marry him, for Johnny's sake

JANET Too late, Mother That should have been eight years ago to be any use

MRS DE MULLIN Better too late than not at all

JANET Better not at all than too late

MRS DE MULLIN He seduced you, Janet

JANET [*thoughtfully*] Did he? I was twenty-seven He was twenty If either of us was to blame, wasn't I?

MRS DE MULLIN Janet, you're trying to screen him

JANET Dearest Mother, you talk like a sentimental novel

MRS DE MULLIN [*indignantly*] And he's to be allowed to marry Bertha Alden ham, just as if this had never happened?

JANET Why not? It's not *her* fault, is it? And girls find it difficult enough to get married nowadays, goodness knows

MRS DE MULLIN Still, she *ought* to be told, Janet I think she must be told

JANET My dear Mother, if *she* knows everybody will know, and the scandal will make all the dead and gone De Mullins turn in their graves As for Father, it would simply kill him out of hand

MRS DE MULLIN [*sadly*] Poor Father!

JANET [*briskly*] So, on the whole, I don't think we'll tell any one Come, Mother, it's time we started [*More*

kindly] Poor Mother Don't fret Perhaps Hester will have some news to cheer you you when we get home

MRS DE MULLIN Hester?

JANET [*rallying*] An engagement, Mother Hester's engagement Hester and Mr Brown have been decorating the church for the last *four* hours What an opportunity for a declaration! Or don't people propose in church?

MRS DE MULLIN Janet, how can you laugh after what has happened?

JANET Laugh? Of course I can laugh What else is there to do? Let's go home Johnny! Johnny!

[*Calls By this time twilight is falling A full moon has begun to rise, lighting up the scene*]

JOHNNY [*off*] Yes, Mummie

JANET Come along, dear Mother's going to start

JOHNNY [*off*] All right, Mummie [*Entering*] Oh, Mummie, you've not seen my rabbits yet!

JANET No It's too dark to-night Mother must come and see them another time

JOHNNY You won't forget, will you, Mummie? [*Looking at MRS DE MULLIN*] Grandmother, you've been crying Is that because I stung myself with a nettle?

JANET Little egoist! Of course it is Give your grandmother a kiss and we'll all walk home together

[*MRS DE MULLIN stoops and kisses JOHNNY passionately They go off through the gate and the curtain falls*]

ACT III

Five days have passed since Act II

SCENE—*As in Act I Time, late afternoon When the curtain rises MRS CLOUSTON, MRS DE MULLIN and JANET are on the stage The nervous tension of the last few days has clearly told on JANET, who looks feverish and irritable*

MRS DE MULLIN [*speaking off into the outer hall*] Good-bye! Good-bye!

JANET [*who is standing in the middle of the hall, scornfully*] Good-bye! Good-bye!

MRS CLOUSTON [*shocked*] Janet!

JANET [*fiercely*] How many times a week does that Bulstead woman think it necessary to call on us?

MRS CLOUSTON [*sitting*] She doesn't call very often

JANET She's been three times this week

MRS DE MULLIN [*closing door*] Naturally she wants to hear how your father is, dear

JANET [*irritably*] My dear Mother, what *can* it matter to Mrs Bulstead whether Father lives or dies?

MRS DE MULLIN Janet!

JANET [*exasperated*] Well, Mother, do you seriously believe she cares? Or Miss Deanes? Or Miss Rolt? Or any of these people? They only call because they've nothing better to do It's sheer mental vacuity on their part Besides, Father's perfectly well now They know that But they go on *calling, calling*! I wonder Miss Deanes doesn't bring her cockatoo to inquire

[*Tramps to and fro impatiently*]

MRS CLOUSTON Really, Janet, I can't think what's the matter with you Do sit down and try and exercise some self-control

JANET I've no self-control where these Brendon people are concerned They get on my nerves, every one of them Where's Johnny?

MRS DE MULLIN In the garden, I think

JANET Sensible boy! He's had enough of visitors for one day, I'll be bound I'll go out and join him [*Goes out angrily*]

MRS CLOUSTON I can't think what's come to Janet the last day or two Her temper gets worse and worse

MRS DE MULLIN Perhaps it's only the hot weather No De Mullin—

MRS CLOUSTON Nonsense, Jane, don't be foolish We can't have Janet giving way to that sort of thing at her age

MRS DE MULLIN I'm afraid she is rather irritable just now She flew out quite savagely at Hester to-day just after luncheon

MRS CLOUSTON Why was that?

MRS DE MULLIN Because of something she had been teaching Johnny The Athanasian Creed I think it was Yes, it must have been that because Johnny asked Janet what was meant by three Incomprehensibles Janet asked him where he had heard all that, and Johnny said Aunt Hester had taught it to him Janet was very angry and forbade Hester ever to teach him anything again Hester was quite hurt about it

MRS CLOUSTON Naturally Still, I do think Hester might have chosen something else to teach him

MRS DE MULLIN That was what Janet said

MRS CLOUSTON But that's no reason why she shouldn't behave herself when visitors are here She was quite rude to Mrs Bulstead What they think of her in London when she goes on like this I can't imagine

MRS DE MULLIN Perhaps she isn't like this in London

MRS CLOUSTON Of course she is, Jane Worse Here she has the restraining influences of home life Whereas in London, living alone as she does

MRS DE MULLIN She has Johnny!

MRS CLOUSTON She has Johnny, of course But that's not enough She ought to have a husband to look after her

MRS DE MULLIN [*sighs*] Yes

[*Sits herself slowly beside her sister*]

MRS CLOUSTON Where's Hester?

MRS DE MULLIN At church, I expect

MRS CLOUSTON Church! Why, the girl's always at church

MRS DE MULLIN It's a Wednesday And it does no harm, I think

MRS CLOUSTON Let us hope not, Jane

[*DE MULLIN enters by the door on the left He has evidently got over his recent attack and looks comparatively hale and vigorous*]

MRS DE MULLIN Have you had your nap, Hugo?

DE MULLIN Yes The sunset woke me, I suppose It was shining full on my face

MRS DE MULLIN What a pity it woke you

DE MULLIN It didn't matter I've slept enough [*Wanders towards sofa*] Where's Johnny?

MRS DE MULLIN In the garden, I think, with Janet

DE MULLIN [*wanders to window and looks out*] Yes There he is He's playing hide-and-seek with Ellen Now she's caught him No, he's got away Bravo, Johnny! [*Stands watching intently for a while Then turns and comes down*] What a fine little fellow it is! A true De Mullin!

MRS DE MULLIN Do you think so, Hugo?

DE MULLIN Every inch of him! [*Pause, sits, half to himself*] If only Janet had been married!

MRS DE MULLIN [*sighs*] Yes

DE MULLIN [*musings*] I wonder who the father really was [*Looking up*] She has never told you, Jane, I suppose?

MRS DE MULLIN [*steadily, without looking up*] No, Hugo

MRS CLOUSTON And never will Nobody was ever so obstinate as Janet

DE MULLIN [*nods sadly*] Janet always had plenty of will

MRS CLOUSTON Far too much!

[*Pause*]

MRS DE MULLIN You'll quite miss Johnny when he goes away from us, won't you, Hugo?

DE MULLIN Yes I never thought I could grow so fond of a child The house will seem empty without him

MRS DE MULLIN I shall miss him too

DE MULLIN We shall all miss him [*Pause Thoughtfully*] I wonder if Janet would leave him with us when she goes back to London?

MRS DE MULLIN Leave him with us? Altogether, you mean?

DE MULLIN Yes

MRS DE MULLIN I'm afraid not, Hugo In fact, I'm quite sure she would not She's so fond of Johnny

DE MULLIN I suppose she wouldn't [*Pause*] I was greatly shocked at what you told me about her the other day, Harriet

MRS CLOUSTON About her keeping a shop, you mean?

DE MULLIN Yes And going into partnership with a Miss Higgs or Hicks It all sounds most discreditable

MRS CLOUSTON Deplorable

MRS DE MULLIN [*meekly*] She had to do something to keep herself, Hugo

DE MULLIN No doubt Still, it can't be considered a proper sort of position for my daughter I think she must give it up at once

MRS DE MULLIN She would only have to take to something else

DE MULLIN Not necessarily She might come back here to live with us with Johnny, of course

MRS DE MULLIN [*astonished*] Live with us?

DE MULLIN Why not, Jane?

MRS DE MULLIN Well, of course, if you think so, Hugo

MRS CLOUSTON Are you sure you will like to have Janet living at home again, Hugo?

DE MULLIN I think it might be the best arrangement And I shall like to have Johnny here He's our only descendant, Harriet, the last of the De Mullins If you or Jane had had a son it would be different

MRS CLOUSTON [*sighs*] Yes

DE MULLIN As it is, I don't see how we can do anything better than have them both down here—as Jane doesn't think Janet would part with Johnny. It would be better for Janet, too. It would take her away from her present unsatisfactory surroundings. It would give her a position and independence—everything she now lacks.

MRS DE MULLIN I should have thought she was *independent* now, Hugo.

DE MULLIN [*irritably*] My dear Jane, how can a woman possibly be independent whose income comes out of selling hats? The only form of independence that is possible or desirable for a woman is that she shall be dependent upon her husband or, if she is unmarried, on her nearest male relative. I am sure *you* agree with me, Harriet?

MRS CLOUSTON Quite, Hugo.

DE MULLIN Very well. I will speak to her about it at once.

MRS DE MULLIN [*nervously*] I hardly think I would say anything about it to day, Hugo.

DE MULLIN Why not, Jane?

MRS DE MULLIN Well, she seems nervous and irritable to-day. I think I should put it off for a day or two.

DE MULLIN [*testily*] My dear Jane, you are always procrastinating. If such arrangement is to be made the sooner it is made the better. [*Goes to window and calls*] Janet, my dear! Janet!

[*Pause. Then JANET appears at center window.*]

JANET Did you call me, Father?

DE MULLIN Yes. Come to me for a moment. I want to speak to you. [*DE MULLIN wanders undecidedly to the fireplace. A moment later JANET enters from the garden.*] Is Johnny with you?

JANET No. He's having tea with Ellen. I said he might.

[*Pause. JANET comes down.*]

DE MULLIN Janet, your mother and I have been talking over your future.

JANET Have you, Father?

[*With a quick glance at her mother.*]

MRS DE MULLIN, however, makes no sign.

DE MULLIN Yes. We have come to the conclusion that it would be better for you to come back here to live.

[*JANET faces round towards her father.*]

JANET But what would become of the business?

DE MULLIN You will have to give up

the business, of course. So much the better. You never ought to have gone into it. It was not at all a suitable occupation for you.

JANET But I like it, Father.

MRS CLOUSTON *Like it!* A De Mullin *like* keeping a shop! Impossible.

JANET [*firmly*] Yes, Aunt Harriet, I like it. And I'm proud of it.

DE MULLIN [*sharply*] Nonsense, Janet. Nobody can possibly be proud of keeping a shop.

JANET I am. I made it, you see. It's my child, like Johnny.

DE MULLIN [*amazed*] Janet! Do you understand what you're doing? I offer you the chance of returning to Brendon to live as my daughter.

JANET [*indifferently*] I quite understand, Father. And I'm much obliged for the offer. Only I decline it. That's all.

MRS CLOUSTON Really!

DE MULLIN [*with dignity*] The question is, are you to be allowed to decline it, in Johnny's interests if not your own?

JANET Johnny's?

DE MULLIN Yes. Johnny's. As long as he was a child it made little difference where he was brought up. Relatively little that is. Now he is getting to an age when early associations are all-important. Living here at Brendon in the home of his ancestors he will grow up worthy of the race from which he is descended. He will be a true De Mullin.

JANET [*quietly*] Perhaps I don't want him to be a true De Mullin, Father.

DE MULLIN What do you mean?

JANET My dear Father, you're infatuated about your De Mullins. Who are the De Mullins after all? Mere country squires who lived on here down at Brendon generation after generation. What have they ever done that I should want Johnny to be like them? Nothing. There's not one of them who has ever distinguished himself in the smallest degree or made his name known outside his native village. The De Mullins are, and have always been, nobodies. Look at their portraits. Is there a single one of them that is worth a second glance? Why, they never even had the brains to be painted by a decent artist. With the result that they aren't worth the canvas they're painted on. Or is it board? I'd make a bonfire of them if they were mine.

MRS DE MULLIN Janet!

JANET [*impatiently*] I would. You seem to think there's some peculiar virtue about always living in the same place. I

believe in people uprooting themselves with their lives. What was the good of the De Mullins going on living down here century after century, always a little poorer, and a little poorer, selling a farm here, mortgaging another there, instead of going out into the world to seek their fortunes? We've stayed too long in one place, we De Mullins. We shall never be worth anything sleeping away our lives down at Brendon.

DE MULLIN [*sharply*] Janet, you are talking foolishly. What you say only makes it clearer to me that you cannot be allowed to live by yourself in London any longer. Such a life is demoralizing to you. You must come back to Brendon.

JANET I shall not come back to Brendon, Father. On that I am quite determined.

DE MULLIN [*with dignity*] My dear, this is not a matter that rests with you. My mind is made up. Hitherto I have asked you to return. Do not force me to command you.

JANET [*fiercely*] Command? By what right do you command?

DE MULLIN By the right of a father, Janet. By that right I insist on your obedience.

JANET [*losing her temper*] Obedience! Obedience! I owe no one obedience. I am of full age and can order my life as I please. Is a woman never to be considered old enough to manage her own affairs? Is she to go down to her grave everlastingly under tutelage? Is she always to be obeying a father when she's not obeying a husband? Well, I for one will not submit to such nonsense. I'm sick of this everlasting obedience.

DE MULLIN [*fiercely*] Janet!
[*Door opens on the left. ELLEN enters with the lamp. There is a considerable pause, during which ELLEN puts the lamp down, turns it up, pulls down the blind and begins to draw the curtains. In the middle of the last process DE MULLIN intervenes, irritably.*] You can leave the curtains, Ellen.

ELLEN Very well, sir.

[*Exit ELLEN with maddening deliberation. Pause.*]

JANET Father, I'm sorry if what I said vexed you. Perhaps I spoke too strongly.

DE MULLIN [*with great dignity*] Very well, Janet. You will remain with us.

JANET No, Father, that's not possible. For Johnny's sake, as well as my own, it would be madness for us to live down here.

DE MULLIN For Johnny's sake?

JANET Yes, Johnny's. In London we're

not known, he and I. There he's simply Johnny Seagrave, the son of a respectable widow who keeps a hat-shop. Here he is the son of Janet De Mullin who ran away from home one night eight years ago and whose name was never mentioned again by her parents until one fine day she turned up with an eight-year-old boy and said she was married. How long would they take to see through *that* story down here, do you think?

MRS CLOUSTON [*tartly*] Whose fault is that?

JANET Never mind whose fault it is, Aunt Harnet. The question is, will they see through it or will they not? Of course they *know* nothing so far, but I've no doubt they suspect. What else have people to do down here but suspect other people? Miss Deanes murmurs her doubts to Mrs Bulstead and Mrs Bulstead shakes her head to Miss Deanes. Mrs Bulstead! What right has *she* to look down that huge rose of hers at *me*? She's had *ten* children!

MRS DE MULLIN Janet! She's married.

JANET To Mr Bulstead! That vulgar animal! You don't ask me to consider that a *merit*, do you? No, Mrs Bulstead shan't have the chance of sneering at Johnny if I can help it. Or at me either.

MRS DE MULLIN Janet, listen to me. You don't understand how your father feels about this or how much it means to him. Johnny is his only grandchild—our only descendant. He would adopt him and call him De Mullin, and then the name would not die out. You know how much your father thinks of that and how sorry he has always been that I never had a son.

JANET [*more gently*] I know, Mother. But when Hester marries—

DE MULLIN Hester?

JANET Yes.

DE MULLIN [*turning angrily to his wife*] But whom is Hester going to marry? Is she going to marry? I have heard nothing about this. What's this, Jane? Has something been kept from me?

MRS DE MULLIN No, no, Hugo. Nothing has been kept from you. It's only some fancy of Janet's. She thinks Mr Brown is going to propose to Hester. There's nothing in it, really.

DE MULLIN Mr Brown! Impossible!

MRS CLOUSTON Quite impossible!

JANET [*calmly*] Why impossible, Father?

DE MULLIN He would never dare to do such a thing. *Mr Brown* to have the audacity to propose to *my* daughter!

JANET [*quietly*] Why not, Father?

DE MULLIN [*bubbling with rage*] Because he is not of a suitable position. Because the *De Mullins* cannot be expected to marry people of *that* class. Because

JANET [*shrugs*] I dare say Mr. Brown won't think of all that. Anyhow, I hope he won't. I hope he'll propose to Hester and she'll accept him, and then when they've a whole herd of little Browns you can select one of them and make a *De Mullin* of him, poor little wretch.

[*At this moment HESTER enters from the garden. An uncomfortable silence falls.*]

MRS DE MULLIN Hush, hush, Janet. Here is Hester. Is that you, Hester? Have you come from church?

HESTER Yes, Mother.

[*She comes down, her face looking pale and drawn, and stands by her mother.*]

MRS DE MULLIN You're very late, dear.

HESTER A little. I stayed on after service was over.

MRS CLOUSTON How very eccentric of you!

HESTER [*quietly*] I suppose saying one's prayers does seem eccentric to you, Aunt Harriet.

MRS CLOUSTON My dear Hester, considering you'd only just finished *one* service.

JANET [*who has not noticed the look on her sister's face*] Well, Aunt Harriet, who was right?

MRS DE MULLIN Hush, Janet!

JANET [*gaily*] My dear Mother, what on earth is there to "hush" about? And what on earth is there to keep Hester in church half an hour after service is over, if it's not what I told you?

HESTER What do you mean?

JANET Nothing, dear. Come and give me a kiss. [*Pulling her towards her.*]

HESTER [*repulsing her roughly*] I won't. Leave me alone, Janet. What has she been saying about me, Mother? I insist on knowing.

MRS DE MULLIN Nothing, dear. Only some nonsense about you and Mr. Brown. Janet is always talking nonsense.

JANET Yes, Hester. About you and Mr. Brown. *Your* Mr. Brown. Confess he has asked you to marry him, as I said?

HESTER [*slowly*] Mr. Brown is engaged to be married to Agatha Bulstead. He told me this evening after service.

JANET He told you!

HESTER Yes. He asked me to congratulate him.

JANET The little wretch!

MRS DE MULLIN To Agatha Bulstead? That's the plain one, isn't it?

HESTER The third one. Yes.

JANET The plain one! Good heavens it oughtn't to be allowed. The children will be little monsters.

MRS CLOUSTON So that's why you were so long at church?

HESTER Yes. I was praying they might be happy.

JANET Poor Hester!

MRS DE MULLIN Are you disappointed, dear?

HESTER I'd rather not talk about it if you don't mind, Mother.

MRS DE MULLIN Your father would never have given his consent.

HESTER So Mr. Brown said.

JANET The little worm.

MRS DE MULLIN My dear!

JANET Well, Mother, isn't it too contemptible?

DE MULLIN I'm bound to say Mr. Brown seems to have behaved in a very fitting manner.

JANET You think so, Father?

DE MULLIN Certainly. He saw what my objections would be and recognized that they were reasonable. Nothing could be more proper.

JANET Well, Father, I don't know what you want. Ten minutes ago you were supposed to be wanting a grandson to adopt. Here's Hester going the right way to provide one, and you don't like that either.

HESTER What is all this about, Father? What have you all been discussing while I've been out?

MRS DE MULLIN It was nothing about you, Hester.

HESTER I'm not sure of that, Mother. Anyhow, I should like to hear what it was.

MRS CLOUSTON Hester, that is not at all a proper tone to use in speaking to your mother.

HESTER [*fiercely*] Please don't interfere, Aunt Harriet. I suppose I can be trusted to speak to my mother properly by this time.

MRS CLOUSTON You certainly ought to, my dear. You are quite old enough.

HESTER Very well, then. Perhaps you will be good enough not to dictate to me in the future. What was it you were discussing, Father?

JANET I'll tell you, Hester. Father wanted to adopt Johnny. He wanted me to come down here to live altogether.

HESTER Indeed? Well, Father, understand, please, that if Janet comes down here to live, I go!

MRS DE MULLIN Hester!

HESTER I will not live in the same house with Janet. Nothing shall induce me I would rather beg my bread.

JANET That settles it then. Thanks, Hester. I'm glad you had the pluck to say that. You are right. Quite right.

HESTER I can do without your approval, Janet.

JANET [*recklessly*] Of course you can. But you can have it all the same. You never wanted me down here. You always disapproved of my being sent for. I ought never to have come. I wish I hadn't come. My coming has only done harm to Hester, as she knew it would.

DE MULLIN How harm?

JANET Mr. Brown would have asked Hester to marry him if I hadn't come. He meant to, I'm sure of it.

MRS DE MULLIN But he said

JANET I know. But that was only an excuse. Young men aren't so considerate of their future fathers-in-law as all that nowadays. No Mr. Brown heard some story about me from Miss Deanes. Or perhaps the Vicar put him on his guard. Isn't it so, Hester? [*HESTER nods*]

MRS DE MULLIN But as your father would never have consented, dear

HESTER [*slowly*] Still, I'd rather he had asked me, Mother.

JANET Quite right, Hester! I'm glad you've got some wholesome feminine vanity left in your composition. And you'd have said "yes," like a sensible woman.

HESTER Oh, you're always sneering!

JANET Yes. But I'm going, Hester, going! That's the great thing. Keep your eyes fixed steadily on that and you'll be able to bear anything else. That reminds me [*Goes to door and calls loudly into the hall*] Johnny! Johnny!

MRS CLOUSTON Really, Janet!

JANET Oh, I forgot. It's not genteel to call into the passage, is it? I ought to have rung. I apologize, Aunt Harriet [*Calls again*] Johnny!

MRS DE MULLIN Why are you calling Johnny?

JANET To tell him to put on his hat and coat, Mother, dear. I'm going to the station.

DE MULLIN You're going to-night?

JANET Yes, Father, to-night. I've done harm enough down here. I'm going away.

JOHNNY [*entering*] Do you want me, Mummie?

JANET Yes. Run and put on your things and say good-bye to Cook and Ellen and tell Robert to put in the pony. Mother's going back to London.

JOHNNY Are we going now, Mummie?

JANET [*nods*] As fast as the tram can carry us. And tell Ellen to lock my trunk for me and give you the key. Run along.

[*Exit JOHNNY*]

DE MULLIN Lock your trunk! But you've not packed?

JANET Oh, yes, I have. Everything's packed, down to my last shoelace. I don't know how often I haven't packed and unpacked during the last five days.

MRS DE MULLIN [*astounded and hurt*] You meant to leave us then, Janet? You've been wanting to leave us all the time?

JANET Yes, Mother. I've been wanting to leave you. I can't stay here any longer. Brendon stifles me. It has too many ghosts. I suppose it's your ridiculous De Mullins.

DE MULLIN Janet!

JANET I know, Father. That's blasphemy, isn't it? But I can't help it. I must go. I've been meaning to tell you every day for the last four days, but somehow I always put it off.

DE MULLIN Understand me, Janet. If you leave this house to-night you leave it for ever.

JANET [*cheerfully*] All right, Father.

DE MULLIN [*growing angrier*] Understand, too, that if you leave it you are never to hold communication with me or with any one in it henceforward. You are cut off from the family. I will never see you or recognize you in any way, or speak to you again as long as I live.

JANET [*astounded*] My dear Father, why are you so angry? Is there anything so dreadful in my wanting to live in London instead of in the country?

DE MULLIN [*getting more and more excited*] Why am I angry? Why am I?

MRS DE MULLIN Sh! Hugo! You mustn't excite yourself. You know the doctor said.

DE MULLIN Be quiet, Jane! [*Turning furiously to JANET*] Why am I angry? You disgrace the family. You have a child, that poor fatherless boy.

JANET [*quietly*] Oh come, I could have got along quite well without a father, if it comes to that. And so could Hester.

MRS DE MULLIN Janet!

JANET Well, Mother, what has Father ever done for Hester or me except try and prevent us from doing something we

wanted to do? Hester wanted to marry Mr Brown Father wouldn't have allowed her He's not genteel enough to marry a De Mullin I want to go back to my shop Father objects to that That's not genteel enough for a De Mullin either Well, hang all the De Mullins, say I!

DE MULLIN [*furrows*] I forbid you speak of your family in that way—of my family I forbid it! It is an outrage Your ancestors were honorable men and pure women They did their duty in the position in which they were born, and handed on their name untarnished to their children Hitherto our honor has been unsullied You have sullied it You have brought shame upon your parents and shame upon your son, and that shame you can never wipe out If you had a spark of human feeling, if you were not worthless and heartless, you would blush to look me in the face or your child in the face But you are utterly hardened I ought never to have offered to receive you back into this house I ought never to have consented to see you again I was wrong I regret it You are unfit for the society of decent people Go back to London Take up the wretched trade you practise there It is what you are fit for

JANET That's exactly what I think, Father As we agree about it why make such a fuss?

DE MULLIN [*furrows*] Janet

HESTER Father, don't argue with her It's no use [*Solemnly*] Leave her to God

JANET Hester, Hester, don't deceive yourself In your heart you envy me my baby, and you know it

HESTER [*indignant*] I do not

JANET You do Time is running on with you, my dear You're twenty-eight Just the age that I was when I met my lover Yes, my lover In a few years you will be too old for love, too old to have children So soon it passeth away and we are gone Your best years are slipping by, and you are growing faded and cross and peevish Already the lines are hardening about your mouth and the hollows coming under your eyes You will be an old woman before your time unless you marry and have children And what will you do then? Keep a lap-dog, I suppose, or sit up at night with a sick cockatoo like Miss Deanes Miss Deanes! Even she has a heart somewhere about her Do you imagine she wouldn't rather give it to her babies than snivel over *poultry*? No, Hester, make good use of your youth, my dear It won't last always And once gone

it is gone forever [*HESTER bursts into tears*] There, there, Hester! I'm sorry I oughtn't to have spoken like that It wasn't kind Forgive me [*HESTER weeps more and more violently*] Hester, don't cry like that I can't bear to hear you I was angry and said more than I should I didn't mean to vex you Come, dear, you mustn't give way like that or you will make yourself ill Dry your eyes and let me see you smile [*Caressing her* HESTER, who has begun by resisting her feebly, gradually allows herself to be soothed] That's better! My dear, what a sight you have made of yourself! But all women are hideous when they've been crying It makes their noses red, and that's dreadfully unbecoming [*HESTER sobs out a laugh*] No You mustn't begin to cry again or I shall scold you I shall, really

HESTER [*half laughing, half crying hysterically*] You seem to think that every woman ought to behave as shamelessly as you did

JANET [*grimly*] No, Hester I don't think that To do as I did needs pluck and brains—and five hundred pounds Everything most women haven't got, poor things So they must marry or remain childless You must marry—the next curate I suppose the Bulsteads will buy Mr Brown a living as he's marrying the plainest of their daughters It's the least they can do But that's no reason why I should marry unless I choose

MRS CLOUSTON Well, I've never heard of anything so disgraceful I thought Janet at least had the grace to be ashamed of what she did!

JANET [*genuinely astonished*] Ashamed? Ashamed of wanting to have a child? What on earth were women created for, Aunt Harriet, if not to have children?

MRS CLOUSTON To marry and have children

JANET [*with relentless logic*] My dear Aunt Harriet, women had children thousands of years before marriage was invented I dare say they will go on doing so thousands of years after it has ceased to exist

MRS DE MULLIN Janet!

JANET Well, Mother, that's how I feel And I believe it's how all wholesome women feel if they would only acknowledge it I wanted to have a child I always did from the time when I got too old to play with dolls Not an adopted child or a child of some one else's, but a baby of my very own Of course I wanted to marry

That's the ordinary way a woman wants to be a mother nowadays, I suppose But time went on and nobody came forward, and I saw myself getting old and my chance slipping away Then I met—never mind And I fell in love with him Or, perhaps, I only fell in love with love I don't know It was so splendid to find some one at last who really cared for me as women should be cared for! Not to talk to because I was clever or to play tennis with because I was strong, but to kiss me and to make love to me! Yes! To make love to me!

DE MULLIN [*solemnly*] Listen to me, my girl You say that now, and I dare say you believe it But when you are older, when Johnny is grown up, you will bitterly repent having brought into the world a child who can call no man father

JANET [*passionately*] Never! Never! That I'm sure of Whatever happens, even if Johnny should come to hate me for what I did, I shall always be glad to have been his mother At least I shall have lived These poor women who go through life listless and dull, who have never felt the joys and pains a mother feels, how they would envy me if they knew! If they knew! To know that a child is your very own, is a part of you That you have faced sickness and pain and death itself for it That it is yours and nothing can take it from you because no one can understand its wants as you do To feel its soft breath on your cheek, to soothe it when it is fretful and still it when it cries, that is motherhood and that is glorious!

[*JOHNNY runs in by the door on the left He is obviously in the highest spirits at the thought of going home*] JOHNNY The trap is round, Mummie, and the luggage is in

JANET That's right Good-bye, Father

[*He does not move*] Say good-bye to your grandfather, Johnny You won't see him again [*DE MULLIN kisses JOHNNY*]

MRS DE MULLIN Janet!

JANET No, Mother It's best not [*Kisses her*] It would only be painful for Father Good-bye, Aunt Harriet Good-bye, Hester

[*Looks at HESTER doubtfully HESTER rises, goes to her slowly and kisses her*]

HESTER Good-bye

[*Exeunt JOHNNY and JANET by the door on the right*]

DE MULLIN [*his gray head bowed on his chest as MRS DE MULLIN timidly lays her hand on his shoulder*] The last of the De Mullins! The last of the De Mullins! [*The curtain falls*]

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Handle Wakes, Stanley Houghton
The Barretts of Wimpole Street, Rudolph Besier
A Family Man, John Galsworthy
The House of Connelly, Paul Green

JOHN FERGUSON
(1915)

BY
ST JOHN ERVINE

CHARACTERS

JOHN FERGUSON, *a farmer*
SARAH FERGUSON, *his wife*
ANDREW FERGUSON, *his son*
HANNAH FERGUSON, *his daughter*
JAMES CAESAR, *a grocer*
HENRY WITHEROW, *a farmer and miller*
"CLUTIE"¹ JOHN MAGRATH, *a beggar*
SAM MAWHINNEY, *a postman*
SERGEANT KERNAGHAN R I C
Two Constables
A Crowd of Men and Women, Boys and Girls

¹ "Clutie" is a slang expression meaning "left-handed"

*action takes place in the kitchen of a farm-house in County
Down, Ireland, in the late summer of the year 1885*

ST JOHN ERVINE

IN 1898, William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory laid the plans for a national Irish Literary Theatre, which was almost inevitable in the animated Irish literary revival of the time. The theater was to be uncommercial and devoted entirely to the furtherance of a national Irish drama of literary value. No doubt the undertaking was suggested in part by the Independent Theater of London, which had earlier in the decade produced some Irish plays of the new movement. The Abbey Theater in Dublin became one of the vital drama centers of the world and has so remained, through various stormy crises, to this day. Upon the enlistment of John Millington Synge in the project and the production of his semi-poetic dramas of peasant life, the success of the Irish Theater was established. It was the intention of the founders to limit its productions to folk plays and dramas founded on Irish legends, but under some managements the Abbey Theater expanded into a repertory theater producing plays by Sudermann, Maeterlinck, Strindberg, Evreinov, Sierra, Chekhov, O'Neill, and other outsiders. The most typical playwrights of the Irish Renaissance to have their work performed were Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory, Lord Dunsany, Colum, and Hyde. Of the recent authors, T. C. Murray and Sean O'Casey are most unflinchingly Irish, whereas St. John Ervine, long a Londoner, George Shiels, for some time a resident of America, and Lennox Robinson seem less indubitably Irish. Many of Bernard Shaw's plays have been produced in the Abbey Theater, but he has had no connection with the Irish Literary Revival, and his works belong to English literature like those of his brilliant predecessors in the field of comedy, Goldsmith, Sheridan, and Wilde.

Although an English resident for many years, St. John Ervine to some extent is identified with the Irish movement. At one time he was manager of the Abbey Theater, and some of his best plays were first produced there. In later years, however, he has grown more and more English. The setting of most of his recent plays has been in England, and although *The Ship* has an Irish locale, the flavor is no more Irish than English or Norwegian. Ervine was born in Belfast (in the Protestant section of Ireland) in 1883. When a young man he went to London, where he secured employment with an insurance company. After joining the Fabian Society and coming under the influence of Shaw and the blossoming repertory-theater movement, he returned to journalism and dramatic criticism. He also wrote short stories, novels and plays.

His first play to be performed was *Mixed Marriage* (1911), which aroused considerable controversy upon its production at the Abbey Theater. It combined the popular theme of the "revolt of youth" with the more ticklish one of religious prejudice. *Jane Clegg* (1913) is a drab, realistic example of the soul-corroding aspects of lower middle-class life in an industrial community. The play is excellent of its kind, its sincerity and veracity compensate for its complete lack of humor, dramatic vigor, and beauty. *The Ship* (1921) is a less deftly constructed play, a little less sincere, it is obtrusively didactic but moving and dramatic. *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary* (1923) is a wholly joyous comedy. Although its story is unconvincing, *The First Mrs. Fraser* (1928) has proved to be Ervine's most popular play, this successful imitation of Maugham, however, is less significant than the more original *Jane Clegg* and *John Ferguson*. In addition, Ervine has written a half-dozen novels, numerous short stories, two biographies, and much criticism. During the latter

part of the World War he served as an officer in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, until May, 1918, when he was seriously wounded. In recent years he has contributed a weekly article on the drama to the *Observer* and has assumed the leadership of modern dramatic critics of authority. His lively, reminiscent study *The Theatre in my Time*, often provocative and warmly controversial, should be read by all students interested in the modern British drama. Such recent plays as *Robert's Wife* and *Boyd's Shop* seem pallid alongside sturdy *Jane Clegg* and *John Ferguson*.

John Ferguson was produced at the Abbey Theater in 1915 during Ervine's management, and by the New York Theatre Guild in 1919, the first successful venture of this invaluable organization. It is undoubtedly Ervine's best play, and one of the best of all modern plays. It is a tragedy of middle-class life among the Protestant rural folk in the North of Ireland. The central interest of the play lies in the character of John Ferguson, a deeply and sincerely religious man who undergoes the adversities of Job but who at the end is not miraculously rewarded for his steadfastness as was the Biblical hero. Over the play broods the atmosphere of a Greek tragedy—or a novel by Hardy—a sense of the helplessness of man in the hands of blind chance. After a life of impeccable rectitude, toil, religious devotion, and the practice of Christian virtue, in his last days come sorrow and defeat. To meet them he has a greater armor than his faith which has been ineffectual and comfortless in the great crisis: he has nobility of soul. He is a unique character in English drama, a living individual, far removed from the "type" characters of inferior plays.

JOHN FERGUSON

ACT I

is the afternoon of a warm day in the late summer of the year 1885, and soft sunlight enters the kitchen of JOHN FERGUSON'S farm through the windows and the open door. The kitchen is comfortably furnished, although the FERGUSONS are no longer prosperous, for MRS FERGUSON, who is now sitting by the door, mending socks, takes great pride in maintaining the appearance of fortune. She is a short, stout, healthy woman, pleasant and agreeable even when she is as harassed as she now is and her mind is molded in the kindness of an Ulster woman. She is not a very intelligent woman, and so her sympathies are sometimes flattened by her lack of perception, but, within her limitations, she is an excellent wife and a very good mother.

Her husband, JOHN FERGUSON, is sitting in front of the turf fire, with a rug wrapped round his legs. He is reading a large Bible to himself, and his lips move as if he were silently pronouncing each word. He is an elderly, tired, delicate-looking man, and his dark beard is turning gray. His eyes are set deeply in his head, and they are full of a dark, glowing color. His voice is slow but very firm, although his words are gentle. He looks like a portrait of Moses—not that Moses who led the Israelites out of Egypt and was a great captain of hosts, but the Moses who surveyed the Promised Land from Mount Nebo in the Plains of Moab.

The furniture of the kitchen is good and substantial, and of the sort that one sees in a decent homestead. The door leading to the loaming ("loamie") or lane in front of the house is in the wall at the back of the scene. A person entering the kitchen from the loamie would have a large window on his right hand in the same wall as the door, and a staircase on his left hand. Beyond the staircase, near the front of the scene, is a door leading to other

rooms and also to the scullery and the back of the farm. The fireplace is in the wall opposite that in which the staircase is set. Under the window is a large sofa. A dresser is set between the foot of the staircase and the door leading to the yard. A large table sits in the center of the room. JOHN FERGUSON'S chair now stands against one end of this table, so that he can place his Bible on it easily when he is tired of holding it. The ornaments are those customary in such a house. Over the fireplace a gun is suspended.

SARAH FERGUSON I wonder where Hannah is. I haven't seen her for an hour past.

JOHN FERGUSON [without looking up] She's mebbe in the fields with Andrew. Listen to this, Sarah! [He raises his voice as he reads from the thirtieth of the Psalms of David] "I will extol thee, O Lord, for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord, my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave; thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down into the pit. Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." [He emphasizes what follows] For his anger endureth but a moment, in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." [He turns to his wife] Do you hear that, Sarah? There's great comfort for you!

SARAH FERGUSON Well, indeed, I hope it will, for we have need of joy in this house. We've bore enough trouble. Here's the farm mortgaged up to the hilt, and you sick and not able to do no work this long while, and Henry Witherow bothering you for the money you owe him!

JOHN FERGUSON [holding up the Bible so that she can see it] 'Weeping may endure for a night,' Sarah, "but joy cometh in the morning." Them's grand words! Don't be complainin' now, for sure God

never deserts His own people We have His word for that, Sarah We're tried a while, and then we're given our reward

SARAH FERGUSON Well, we've earned ours, anyway! It's a great pity Andrew's such a poor hand on the farm

JOHN FERGUSON The lad was never meant for the land, Sarah You know rightly I dedicated him to the ministry the day he was born It was a sore blow to the lad when I told him it couldn't be managed, but it was a sorer blow to me

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, indeed, it was, John You were always quaren set on Andrew

JOHN FERGUSON [*proudly*] He's my son! I have great hopes of Andrew

SARAH FERGUSON Well, well, you would have done better, mebbe, to let him go on with his learning, for he's no use at all on the farm I hope to my goodness his uncle Andrew'll send the money to pay the mortgage It's quare him not writing this long while

JOHN FERGUSON He's mebbe had bother He'll write if he has the money by him You may be sure of that

SARAH FERGUSON He never was much of a one for giving anything away, your brother Andrew, and mebbe he'll disappoint you the same as he's disappointed many another person

JOHN FERGUSON I know he's near with money, but all the same I think he'll be willing to lend me the price of the mortgage Him and me was born in this house, and we played here together as wee lads Our da was born here too, and his da before him Andrew couldn't let the farm go out of the family after all them generations

SARAH FERGUSON I trust, indeed, he'll not, but it's a quare poor look-out when you think he's never answered your letters to him this long time, and him knowing well you were sick and helpless Dear knows what'll become of us all if he doesn't send the money! Henry Witherow's a hard man, John, and he'll not be willing to wait long [*She rises and looks out of the door*] Here's Hannah now! I wonder is the mail in yet!

JOHN FERGUSON We'll know in a wee while

[*He takes up the Bible again and resumes his reading* HANNAH FERGUSON, a beautiful gurl of twenty, enters the kitchen from the "loane" Her thick black hair is uncovered]

SARAH FERGUSON Is the mail in yet?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*wearily*] The long-car only went by a minute or two ago I met Clutie John at the end of the loane, and he said the mail would be late the day [*She goes to the window-seat and sits down*] It's like Sam Mawhinney to be late the time we want him to be early

JOHN FERGUSON [*with genile rebuke in his voice*] Hannah, child! You don't know what trouble the man may have had It might not be his fault the mail's late Sometimes there's a storm at sea, and that keeps the boats back Mebbe the train was delayed Many's a thing might have happened You shouldn't be blaming Sam for what's mebbe not his fault

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to her father, and putting her arms round his neck*] Da, dear, aren't you the quare one for making excuses for people!

SARAH FERGUSON Well, sure, a lot of them needs it

[*She has resumed her seat by the door and is again busy with her work of mending socks*]

HANNAH FERGUSON How're you now, Da? Are you better nor you were a while ago?

JOHN FERGUSON [*cheerfully*] Ah, boys-a-boys, Hannah, what did you mind me of it for? I was near forgetting I was sick at all That shows I'm better in myself, doesn't it now?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*looking anxiously at him*] You're not letting on, are you, Da?

SARAH FERGUSON Letting on, indeed! Did you ever know your da to let on about anything?

JOHN FERGUSON Indeed, now, and I let on many's a time! There's whiles, when I'm sitting here before the fire, or mebbe there in front of the door when the days is warm, I pretend to myself I'm better again and can go out and do a day's work in the fields with any man [*His voice drops into complaint*] I haven't been in the fields this long time

SARAH FERGUSON [*sharply*] Now, don't be going and making yourself unhappy, John

JOHN FERGUSON No, woman, I won't But it's hard for a man to be sitting here with a rug wrapped round his legs, and him not able to do a hand's turn for his wife and family

HANNAH FERGUSON [*fondling him*] Ah, Da, dear!

JOHN FERGUSON [*complaint now controlling his voice*] And me the man that was always active! There wasn't a

one in the place could beat me at the reaping, not one [*He remembers the consolations of his faith, although his voice falters as he speaks the next sentence*] But it's the will of God! [*He pauses for a moment, and then his mind wanders again to his illness*] Sometimes, when I hear the men in the fields cutting the corn and gathering the harvest, and them shouting to one another and laughing hearty together, I near cry Me not able to go out and help them to bring in the harvest tied here 'like a wee child!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*tearfully*] Da, Da, don't go on that way!

SARAH FERGUSON [*impatiently*] Ah, quit, the two of you! Hannah, I'm surprised at you coming in and upsetting your da, and him keeping his heart up all day!

HANNAH FERGUSON I don't mean to bother you, Da

JOHN FERGUSON [*patting her hair*] No, daughter, you didn't I know that rightly [*Stirring himself and speaking more briskly*] Ah, well! "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" God always has a word to comfort you when your heart's down Mebbe there's a letter in Sam Mawhinney's bag this minute that'll cheer us all up I'm a poor, mealy man to be complaining like that, Hannah, when there's many is worse off nor me only I can't help it sometimes It's when the men are coming down the loanie in the evening with their scythes over their shoulders, and them tired and sweating and hungry for their supper!

Well, God knows His own ways best, and there's many in the world has a harder time nor I have

HANNAH FERGUSON [*trying to take his mind off his illness*] I was letting on too, Da!

SARAH FERGUSON Well, indeed, you might have employed your time to better advantage, Hannah You can let on till you're tired, but you'll never alter anything that way

JOHN FERGUSON What were you letting on, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON I was letting on that my uncle Andrew had sent you all the money you need!

SARAH FERGUSON Well, I hope your pretence will come true, for if he doesn't, we'll have to flit out of this It'll break your da's heart to go, and it'll break my heart too [*She rises and puts her work on the dresser*] I come here as a young grrl, no older nor yourself, Hannah, to be married on your da, and I've lived here

ever since I'll never be happy nowhere else

JOHN FERGUSON [*ruminatingly*] Ay, it'll be hard to go

SARAH FERGUSON There's no sense or purpose in it, God forgive me for saying it!

JOHN FERGUSON There's a meaning in it, whatever happens I can't see God's purpose, but I know well there is one His hand never makes a mistake

HANNAH FERGUSON [*butterfly*] It's quare and hard to see what purpose there is in misfortune and trouble for people that never done nothing to deserve it!

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, quit it, Hannah! If God was to hear you saying the like of that, he'd mebbe strike you dead

JOHN FERGUSON Daughter, dear, you're a young slip of a grrl, or you'd never talk that way [*Sternly*] Do you think God doesn't know how to look after His own world? [*The severity of his voice relaxes*] Everything that happens is made to happen, and everything in the world, the commonest wee fly in the bushes before the door there, has a purpose and a meaning There's things hid from you and me because we're not fit to know them, but the more we fill ourselves with the glory of God, the better we get to understand the world It's people that's full of sin, Hannah, that can't see or understand That's sin—not knowing or understanding! Ignorance is sin Keeping your mind shut is sin Not letting the sun and the air and the warmth of God into your heart—that's sin, Hannah!

[*He sinks back in his chair, fatigued by his outburst*]

SARAH FERGUSON There now, you've made yourself tired

JOHN FERGUSON [*weakly*] I'm all right, woman!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going towards the door*] I wish to my goodness that man Mawhinney would come with the letters!

JOHN FERGUSON He'll soon be here now

HANNAH FERGUSON [*looking out*] He's never in sight yet! [*She speaks the next sentence petulantly, returning to her seat on the sofa as she does so*] Och, here's that man, Jimmy Caesar! I wonder what he wants!

SARAH FERGUSON I wouldn't be surprised but it's you he's after! This isn't the first time he's been here lately, nor yet the second

HANNAH FERGUSON [*crossly*] Och

Ma, quit talking! I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man in the world

SARAH FERGUSON Well, dear bless us, if he was the last man in the world and I wanted him for myself, I wouldn't like to run the risk of making you an offer of him! Sure, what's wrong with the man?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*contemptuously*] He's an old collie, that's what he is! He has no spirit in him at all! Look at the way he goes on about Henry Witherow and what he'll do to him when he gets the chance! He's had many a chance, but he's done nothing

SARAH FERGUSON Would you have him kill the man?

HANNAH FERGUSON He shouldn't go about the place threatening to have Witherow's life when he doesn't mean to take it

JOHN FERGUSON Daughter, dear, I don't like to hear you speak so bitterly! It's foolish of Jimmy Caesar to talk in the wild way he does, though, dear knows, he's had great provocation! But he doesn't mean the half he says!

HANNAH FERGUSON Well, he shouldn't say it then!

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, now, Hannah, if we were all to say just what we meant, more nor half of us would be struck dumb

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, you're right, woman! You are, indeed! Henry Witherow's a hard man, and he put many an indignity on Jimmy Caesar's family! If you knew all he's had to bear, Hannah, you'd pity him, and not be saying hard words against him

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, indeed, John! Witherow'll not be soft on us if we can't pay him what we owe him, and then, Hannah, you'll mebbe understand what Jimmy Caesar's feelings are

HANNAH FERGUSON I'll never understand the feelings of a collie! I like a man to have a spirit and do what he's said he'd do, or else keep his tongue quiet in his head

SARAH FERGUSON Now, it's brave and hard to be having a spirit in these times! Sure, the man must have some pluck in him to turn round and make a good business for himself after him losing near every halfpenny he had, and that man Witherow near bankrupting him, and killing his old da and ma with grief! That's not a poor, paltry spirit, is it?

JOHN FERGUSON You'd better quit talking about him now! He'll step in the

door any minute! Where was he when you saw him, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON He was at the foot of the "loame"

SARAH FERGUSON It's a credit to him the way he's slaved and saved! I dare say he has a big bit of money saved up in the Ulster Bank! [*She goes to the door and looks out*] Ay, here he's coming! [*She calls out to CAESAR*] Is that you, Jimmy? [*CAESAR is heard to shout in response*] If Hannah was to marry him, the way he wants her

HANNAH FERGUSON I wouldn't marry him if he was rolling in riches and had gallons of gold!

SARAH FERGUSON [*returning to the kitchen*] Och, wheesht with you! Sure, the man's right enough, and anyway one man's no worse nor another!

[*JAMES CAESAR comes to the door*
He is a mean-looking man, about thirty-five years of age, and his look of meanness is not mitigated by his air of prosperity. His movements are awkward, and his speech is nervous. He is very eager to please HANNAH, whom he pretends not to see.]

JAMES CAESAR Good day to you all!

JOHN FERGUSON Good day to you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*hesitating at the door*] Can I come in?

SARAH FERGUSON Sure, do! You know you're always welcome here, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*entering*] It's kind of you to say that! [*He puts his hat on the dresser*] It's a brave day!

SARAH FERGUSON It's not so bad

JAMES CAESAR It'll do good to harvest! [*Pretending to see HANNAH for the first time*] Is that you, Hannah? I didn't see you when I come in first! I hope you're keeping your health?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*coldly*] I'm bravely, thank you!

JAMES CAESAR I didn't see you this while back, and I was wondering to myself were you not well or something! I'm glad to see you looking so fine on it! [*To JOHN FERGUSON*] Did you hear from your brother Andrew, John?

SARAH FERGUSON Sam Mawhinney's not got this length yet! Did you see him as you were coming up?

JAMES CAESAR I did not! Are you keeping well, John?

JOHN FERGUSON I'm as well as can be expected, Jimmy

JAMES CAESAR That's good! I'm glad

to hear it It'll be a great blow to you if you have to leave the farm

JOHN FERGUSON It will

JAMES CAESAR [*bitterness growing into his voice*] Ay, it's a quare blow to any man to have to leave the house he was born and reared in, the way I had to do It's Witherow has your mortgage, isn't it?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay

JAMES CAESAR God curse him!

JOHN FERGUSON [*reproachfully*] Jimmy, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR Ah, you're a forgiving man, John Ferguson, but I'm not, and never will be Look at the way he treated me and mine I've never forgot that, and I never will if I live to be a hundred years old [*Violently*] I'll choke the life out of him one of these days!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*turning away scornfully*] Ah, quit, for dear sake You're always talking, Jimmy Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR [*ashamedly*] Ah, I'm always talking, Hannah, and never doing! 'Deed and you're right! When I think of the things he done to me, I go near distracted with shame for taking it as quiet as I have done I go out sometimes, demented mad, swearing to have his life—and I come home again, afeard to lay a finger on him He's big and powerful, and he can take a holt of me and do what he likes with me I'm heartsore at my weakness! That's the God's truth! You do well, Hannah, to be making little of me for a poor-natured man, but it's not for want of desire I don't do an injury to him I haven't the strength—or the courage

JOHN FERGUSON What way is that to be talking, Jimmy Caesar? Would you sin your soul with a murder? Man, man, mind what you're saying and thinking! You're in God's grief already for the thoughts you have in your head Them that has bad thoughts are no better in His eyes nor them that does bad deeds

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, sure, you can't help having thoughts, whatever kind of a mind you have!

JOHN FERGUSON You can help brooding on them What call has Jimmy to be wasting his mind on thinking bad about Henry Witherow? Your life isn't your own to do what you like with It's God's life, and no one else's And so is Henry Witherow's If you take his life or any man's life, no matter why you do it, you're robbing God

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, for dear sake, quit talking about murders You'll have me out of my mind with fear Sure, no-

body wants to kill anybody these times, what with civilization and all them things

HANNAH FERGUSON [*sneeringly*] Och, Ma, don't disturb yourself! Sure, you know it's only talk!

JAMES CAESAR Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON What?

JAMES CAESAR I wanted to have a talk with you, and I was wondering would you be coming down the town the night?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*decisively*] I'm not

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, now, Hannah, you can just go down and get a few things from Jimmy's shop that I'm wanting I was thinking of going myself, but sure you can just step that length and bring them back with you, and while you're on the way, Jimmy can say what he wants to say

HANNAH FERGUSON [*sullenly*] You don't need the things till the morning, Ma, and if you give Jimmy the order now, he can send them up the morrow

JAMES CAESAR Hannah, I want to speak to you particular Will you not come out with me for a wee while?

HANNAH FERGUSON I'm not in the way of going out again the night, thank you!

SARAH FERGUSON Now, you've nothing to do, Hannah, and you can go along with him rightly

HANNAH FERGUSON I've plenty to do

[HENRY WITHEROW *passes the window*]

SARAH FERGUSON Lord save us, there's Witherow

[JAMES CAESAR *instinctively goes into the corner of the room farthest from the door* HENRY WITHEROW, a tall, heavy, coarse-looking man, with a thick, brutal jaw, comes into the kitchen He has a look of great and ruthless strength, and all his movements are those of a man of decision and assurance He does not ask if he may enter the kitchen and sit down, he assumes that he may do so]

HENRY WITHEROW [*sitting down*]

Well, how're you all the day?

SARAH FERGUSON [*nervously*] We're rightly, thank God, Mr Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW I'm glad to hear it I was just passing, John, and I thought I'd drop in and hear how you were getting on

JOHN FERGUSON That was thoughtful of you, Henry

HENRY WITHEROW How're you

Hannah! [*He looks closely at her*] Boys, but you're getting to be a fine-looking girl, Hannah! [*He turns to MRS FERGUSON*] You'll be having all the boys after her! Faith, I wouldn't mind going after her myself

JAMES CAESAR [*pale with anger*] Keep your talk to yourself, Henry Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW [*contemptuously*] Ah, you're there, are you? You haven't a notion of him, have you, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON Your manners could be better, Mr Witherow

HENRY WITHEROW [*laughing*] Could they, now? And who would improve them, eh? Mr James Caesar, Esquire, mebbe?

JAMES CAESAR We want no discourse with you, Henry Witherow Your presence in this house is not welcome!

HENRY WITHEROW Oh, indeed! Have you bought the house? I've heard nothing about the sale, and I think I should have heard something about it I hold the mortgage, you know

JOHN FERGUSON There's no need for bitter talk, Henry Jimmy forgot himself

HENRY WITHEROW Ah, well, as long as he admits it and says he's sorry!

JAMES CAESAR I'm not sorry

HENRY WITHEROW God help you, your tongue's the strongest part of you [*To JOHN FERGUSON*] Now that I'm here, John, perhaps we could discuss a wee matter of business I don't suppose you want to talk about your affairs before all the neighbors, and so if Mr James Caesar will attend to his shop

SARAH FERGUSON [*to HANNAH*] You can go down to the shop with him now, daughter, and leave your da and me to talk to Mr Witherow [*She speaks quietly to HANNAH*] For God's sake, Hannah, have him if he asks you Witherow'll not spare us, and mebbe Jimmy'll pay the mortgage

HENRY WITHEROW [*to JOHN FERGUSON*] I suppose you haven't had any word from Andrew yet?

JOHN FERGUSON Not yet, Henry

HENRY WITHEROW H'm, that's bad!

[*SAM MAWHINNEY, the postman, goes past the window and then past the door*]

SARAH FERGUSON Lord bless us, there's Sam Mawhinney away past the door [*She runs to the door*] Hi, Sam, are you going past without giving us our letter?

SAM MAWHINNEY [*coming to the door*] What letter, Mrs Ferguson?

SARAH FERGUSON [*anxiously*] Haven't you one for us?

SAM MAWHINNEY I have not

HANNAH FERGUSON You haven't!

SARAH FERGUSON Oh, God save us, he hasn't written after all!

HANNAH FERGUSON Isn't the American mail in yet, Sam?

SAM MAWHINNEY It's in right enough I left a letter at Braniel's from their daughter over in Boston Were you expecting one?

JOHN FERGUSON [*desolation in his voice*] Ay, Sam, we were thinking there might be one, but it doesn't matter We'll not keep you from your work

SAM MAWHINNEY I hope you're not put out by it It's a quare disappointment not to get a letter and you expecting it

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, Sam, it is

SAM MAWHINNEY Well, good evening to you!

JOHN FERGUSON Good evening to you, Sam!

[*The postman quits the door SARAH FERGUSON sits down in a chair near the dresser and begins to cry HANNAH stands at the window looking out with hard, set eyes JIMMY CAESAR stands near her, twisting his cap awkwardly in his hands JOHN FERGUSON lies back in his chair in silence They are quiet for a few moments, during which HENRY WITHEROW glances about him, taking in the situation with satisfaction*]

HENRY WITHEROW I suppose that means you can't get the money to pay off the mortgage, John?

JOHN FERGUSON I'm afeard so, Henry

HENRY WITHEROW [*rising*] Well, I'm sorry for you I have a great respect for you, John, and I'd do more for you nor for any one, but money's very close at present, and I need every penny I can put my hands on I'll have to stand by my bargain I'm sorry for you all!

JAMES CAESAR That's a lie, Henry Witherow, and you know well it is! You're the fine man to come here letting on to be sorry for John Ferguson when you would do anything to get him out of this If you were sorry for him, what did you call in your money for when you knew he couldn't pay it? You know rightly you've had your heart set on the farm these years past, and you're afeard of your life he'll mebbe pay the mortgage

HENRY WITHEROW [*going to him and shaking him roughly*] I've stood enough of your back-chat, Caesar, and I'll stand no more of it

JAMES CAESAR [*feebly*] Let me go, will you?

HENRY WITHEROW I'll let you go when I've done with you

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to WITHEROW and striking him in the face*] Go out of this house, Henry Witherow It's not yours yet, and till it is, there's the door to you!

HENRY WITHEROW [*throwing CAESAR from him so that he falls on the floor, where he lies moaning and shivering*] Heth, Hannah, you're a fine woman! You are, in sang! It's a pity to waste you on a lad like that! [*He pushes CAESAR with his foot*] You ought to marry a man, Hannah, and not an old Jenny-Jo! [*He turns to JOHN FERGUSON*] John, I'll have to have a serious talk with you in a wee while, but it's no good stopping to have it now with all this disturbance I'll go and see M'Conkey, the lawyer, first

JOHN FERGUSON Very well, Henry

HENRY WITHEROW I'm sorry for you, but I must look after myself

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, so you must It's a hard thing to have to leave the home you're used to, but it can't be helped I'm getting an old man, and I haven't much longer here I'd like to end my days where they were begun, but

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to her father*] Don't take on, Da! There'll mebbe be a way out of it all [*To WITHEROW*] Mr Witherow, will you not let the mortgage go on for a while longer? We've had a great deal of trouble lately, and my brother Andrew's not accustomed to the farm yet If you were to give us more time, mebbe my uncle'll send the money later on

HENRY WITHEROW Ay, and mebbe he'll not Your uncle Andrew's not over-anxious to part with anything as far as I can see I'm sorry, Hannah, but I can't ruin myself to oblige other people

JOHN FERGUSON It was to be You can foreclose, Henry

SARAH FERGUSON Andrew's a poor brother to you, John, to let you be brought to this bother and you sick and sore

JOHN FERGUSON Poor Andrew, he must be heart-scalded at not being able to send the money He'd have sent it if he had had it by him I know he would I can picture him there, not writing because he

hasn't the heart to tell us he can't send the money

[*CAESAR, who has risen from the floor, comes to JOHN FERGUSON and speaks almost hysterically*]

JAMES CAESAR John, I know rightly that Witherow has set his heart on your farm I know he has, and he's an old hypocrite if he says he's sorry for you! But I'll spite him yet, I will! I'm willing to pay off the mortgage for you if it costs me every penny I have

SARAH FERGUSON [*rising and embracing him*] Oh, God reward you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*putting her aside*] If Hannah'll listen to me

HENRY WITHEROW Ay, if Hannah'll listen to you! Huh! You'd make a bargain on your ma's coffin, Jimmy Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR [*weakly*] I don't want nothing more to say to you, Henry Witherow Anything that passes between you and me now will come through a solicitor

HENRY WITHEROW Ay, you're mighty fond of the law You'll get your fill of it one of these days [*To HANNAH*] Well, my bold girl, are you going to take the fine offer's been made for you here by Mr James Caesar, Esquire? Because I'd like to know what the position is before I go There's no good in me going to M'Conkey and incurring expense needlessly!

HANNAH FERGUSON I bid you go before, Mr Witherow Will you have me bid you go again?

HENRY WITHEROW Ah, now, quit talking!

HANNAH FERGUSON It's well for you my da's sick, and there's no man in the house to chastise you the way you deserve I can't put you out myself, so you must stay if you won't go

HENRY WITHEROW [*disconcerted, and beginning to bluster*] Oh, come now, Hannah, there's no need to go on like that

HANNAH FERGUSON [*resuming her seat on the sofa*] I've said all I've got to say, Mr Witherow A decent man wouldn't be standing there after what I've said to you

[*The sound of a tin whistle is heard outside*]

JAMES CAESAR Mebbe you'll go now, Witherow!

HENRY WITHEROW If I go, it'll not be because you ask me! [*To HANNAH*] You've a sharp tongue in your head, Hannah! I'd like to cut a bit of it off for you! [*To JOHN FERGUSON*] Well, John, you'll mebbe let me know later on what

course you'll take about the mortgage I'll be up at the mill the rest of the day Good morning to you all! [He goes out]

JAMES CAESAR Hell to him!

[The whistling which has persisted all this time stops suddenly, and HENRY WITHEROW is heard outside shouting, "Get out of my road, damn you!" and then CLUTIE JOHN MAGRATH, the half-wit, is heard crying, "Ah, don't strike me, MR WITHEROW"]

SARAH FERGUSON [going to the door] Ah, dear save us, he's couped Clutie John into the hedge!

JAMES CAESAR That's all he can do—strike weak lads like myself, and beat poor fellows that's away in the mind like Clutie John!

SARAH FERGUSON [returning to the kitchen] Ah, well, he's not much hurt anyway!

[Her eyes are still wet with tears, and she wipes them as she sits down The tin whistle is heard again, and continues to be heard until CLUTIE JOHN appears at the door]

JAMES CAESAR [to JOHN FERGUSON] You heard what I said, John?

JOHN FERGUSON [picking up his Bible and preparing to read it again] Ay, Jimmy, I heard you You have a heart of corn! [He reads] "For his anger endureth not for a moment, in his favour is life weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" [To his wife, who still weeps silently] What are you crying for, Sarah? Do you not hear this from God's Word? "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" That's a promise, isn't it? Dry your eyes, woman! God's got everything planned, and He knows what's best to be done Don't be affronting Him with tears!

JAMES CAESAR [touching him] John, did you not hear me? I was saying I would pay the mortgage if Hannah would only listen to me

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, Jimmy, I heard you right enough, and I'm thankful to you It's kind and neighborly of you, but Hannah has to decide them things for herself with the help of God, not with mine There's no good in a man and a woman marrying if they have no kindly feeling for each other I would rather Henry Witherow foreclosed nor let Hannah do anything she didn't want to do

HANNAH FERGUSON Da!

[She kneels beside him]

JOHN FERGUSON [drawing her close to him] Ay, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON [struggling to speak] Da, I I

JAMES CAESAR [eagerly] I wouldn't make a hard bargain with you, John! Do you hear me, Hannah? Your da and ma could live on the place where he was born

SARAH FERGUSON God'll reward you, Jimmy!

[HANNAH FERGUSON gets up from her place by her father's side She looks at the old man for a few moments He takes her hand and presses it warmly, and then smiles at her]

JOHN FERGUSON Whatever you think will be right, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, Da [To JAMES CAESAR] I thank you for your offer, Jimmy! I'll I'll have you!

JOHN FERGUSON [hoarsely] Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON I'll have him, Da!

SARAH FERGUSON [embracing her] Oh, thank God, Hannah, thank God!

JAMES CAESAR [uncertainly] I can't tell you all I feel, Hannah, but I'll be a good man to you

JOHN FERGUSON May God bless the two of you!

[The sound of the tin whistle grows louder CLUTIE JOHN MAGRATH appears at the door He is a half-wit and his age is about thirty]

CLUTIE JOHN I see you're all there!

SARAH FERGUSON Och, away on with you, Clutie! We don't want you here with your whistle!

CLUTIE JOHN [entering the kitchen] Ah, now, Mrs Ferguson, what harm does my whistle do to you? [To JAMES CAESAR] Good evening to you, Mr Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR [sharply] I have nothing for you!

CLUTIE JOHN That's a quare pity, Mr Caesar! I was thinking to myself as I was coming along, "Clutie John, if you were to meet Mr Caesar now, he'd mebbe give you the lend of a halfpenny!"

JAMES CAESAR Well, you were thinking wrong, then, and you can just march on out of this as quick as you like There's no money here for you

CLUTIE JOHN Ah, well, the Lord will send relief, though you won't be the honored instrument Sure, I'll just play a tune to you for the pleasure of the thing [He puts the whistle to his lips, and then takes it away again] You didn't kill Mr Witherow yet, Mr Caesar?

JAMES CAESAR [*furiously*] Go 'long to hell out of this, will you?

[*He is about to strike CLUTIE JOHN, but MRS FERGUSON prevents him from doing so*]

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, don't hurt the poor soul, Jimmy! Sure, you know rightly he's astray in the mind

CLUTIE JOHN Ay, that's true, Mrs Ferguson! That's true enough I'm away in the head, and I ought to be locked up in the asylum! And I would be if I was worse nor I am! It's a quare pity of a man that's not distracted enough to be put in the madhouse and not wise enough to be let do what the rest of you do. It's a hard thing now that a man as harmless as myself can't be let play his whistle in peace

JAMES CAESAR Why don't you do some work?

CLUTIE JOHN Sure, didn't I tell you I'm astray in the mind!

JAMES CAESAR It's a nice thing when a big lump of a man like yourself goes tramping about the country playing tunes on an old whistle instead of turning your hand to something useful. You can work well enough if you like

CLUTIE JOHN [*regarding his whistle affectionately*] I would rather be whistling. There's plenty can work, but few can whistle

HANNAH FERGUSON What do you want, Clutie?

CLUTIE JOHN I want many's a thing that I'll never get. Did you ever hear me whistling "Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn"? That's a grand tune, for all it's a Catholic tune!

JAMES CAESAR We heard it many's a time, and we don't want to hear it again. Out out of the place!

JOHN FERGUSON Come here, Clutie! [*CLUTIE JOHN goes to him*] Did you want anything to eat?

CLUTIE JOHN I always want something to eat

JOHN FERGUSON Hannah, give him a sup of sweet milk and a piece of soda bread. Poor lad, his belly is empty many's a time

[*HANNAH goes to get the bread and milk for CLUTIE*]

JAMES CAESAR It's a nice thing for her to be attending on the like of him

JOHN FERGUSON Why shouldn't she serve him? We're all children of the one Father, and we're serving Him when we're serving each other

CLUTIE JOHN Will I whistle a tune to you, Mr Ferguson?

[*He does not wait for permission, but begins to play "Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn"*]

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, quit it, will you? You'll have me deafened with your noise!

CLUTIE JOHN Do you not like my whistle, Mrs Ferguson? It's grand music. You should see the wee childer running after me when I play it. "Play us a tune, Clutie John!" they shout when I go by, and sure I just play one to them. They're quare and fond of my whistle. It's only people with bitter minds that doesn't like to hear it. [*HANNAH brings the bread and milk to him, and he puts down his whistle in order to take them from her*] Ah, God love you, Hannah, for your kind heart!

HANNAH FERGUSON Did Henry Witherow hurt you, Clutie, when he couped you in the hedge?

CLUTIE JOHN He did, in sang! He couped me head over heels, and me doing nothing at all to him. That's a bitter man, Hannah, that would take the bite out of your mouth if it would bring a happorth of profit to him. He never was known to give anything to anybody, that man! It's a poor and hungry house he has. I was there one day, when he was at his dinner, and he never as much as asked me had I a mouth on me at all

JAMES CAESAR Ay, you're right there! You are, indeed! There's no charity or loving-kindness about him

CLUTIE JOHN Well, he's not the only one in the world that's like that!

JAMES CAESAR There's people says he sold his soul to the devil

CLUTIE JOHN Ah, why would the devil be buying souls when he can get millions of them for nothing? [*To JOHN FERGUSON*] Did your brother Andrew send the money to pay off the mortgage, Mr Ferguson?

JAMES CAESAR What do you know about his brother Andrew?

CLUTIE JOHN I know many's a thing! I can tell you where a kingfisher has his nest this minute. I saw a golden eagle once! It was in the West I saw it when I was whistling in Connacht. It was a great big bird with a beak on it that would tear the life out of you if it was that way inclined. [*He finishes the milk.*] This is the grand sweet milk! And the fine new bread too! Isn't it grand now to have plenty of that? Will you not let me play a tune to

you to reward you? Sure, I'll not ask you to give me the lend of a halfpenny for it, though you can if you like! I'll do it just for the pleasure of it

JOHN FERGUSON No, Clutie, we can't have you playing your whistle here the night You must go home now We have something important to talk about

SARAH FERGUSON Go on, Clutie John! Away home with you now! We've had enough of your chat for one night You can finish with your bread in the loanie

JAMES CAESAR I'm going now, Hannah Will you walk a piece of the road with me? I've not had you a minute to myself yet with all these interruptions!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*submissively*] Very well, Jimmy

CLUTIE JOHN [*astounded*] Are you going to marry him, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, Clutie

CLUTIE JOHN [*incredulously*] Ah, you're coddling!

JAMES CAESAR Come on, Hannah, and not be wasting your time talking to him [*He goes to the door*] Here's Andrew coming across the fields We'd better wait and tell him

CLUTIE JOHN It'll be a great surprise for him

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, and great joy to him when he knows we'll not have to quit the farm aft. all

[*ANDREW FERGUSON enters He is a slight, delicate-looking lad of nineteen, nearer in looks to his father than his mother He is very tired after his work in the fields, and he carelessly throws down the bridle he is carrying into a corner of the kitchen as if he were too fatigued to put it in its proper place*]

ANDREW FERGUSON Good evening to you, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR Good evening, Andrew! You're looking tired on it!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*sitting down heavily*] I am tired How're you, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON I'm rightly, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON Ma, can I have a drop of sweet milk to drink? I'm nearly dead with the drouth

[*MRS FERGUSON goes to crock to get the milk for him*]

JAMES CAESAR Andrew, I've great news for you Me and your sister's going to be married on it

ANDREW FERGUSON [*starting up*] You're what? [*His mother puts a cup of milk into his hands*] Thank you, Ma!

JAMES CAESAR Ay, we're going to be married, Andrew Hannah's just settled it

SARAH FERGUSON And we'll not have to quit out of the farm after all, Andrew! Jimmy says he'll pay the mortgage off!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*vaguely*] But I thought! [*He turns to HANNAH*]

HANNAH FERGUSON [*quickly*] It's kind of Jimmy, isn't it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*after a pause*] Ay it's kind!

JAMES CAESAR We just stopped to tell the news to you, Andrew, to hearten you up after your day's work, and now Hannah and me's going for a bit of a dander together We haven't had a chance of a word by ourselves yet, and you know the way a couple likes to be by their lone, don't you? Are you ready, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay

JAMES CAESAR Well, come on! Good night to you all!

ALL Good night, Jimmy!

CLUTIE JOHN God reward you, Mr Caesar

JAMES CAESAR [*contemptuously*] Och, you!

[*He goes out HANNAH follows him to the door*]

HANNAH FERGUSON I won't be long before I'm back [*She goes out*]

ANDREW FERGUSON Da, is it true about Hannah and Jimmy?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son, it's true You saw them going out together

ANDREW FERGUSON But did she do it of her own free will?

JOHN FERGUSON Would I force her to it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON No only I suppose my uncle Andrew didn't write, then?

JOHN FERGUSON No

ANDREW FERGUSON I wonder what made her It's a quare set-out, this!

CLUTIE JOHN Did you never hear the story of the girl that killed herself over the head of love? It's a quare sad story

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, wheesh! with you, Clutie! Didn't I tell you before to quit out of this?

CLUTIE JOHN [*coaxingly*] Let me stay a wee while longer here by the fire, Mrs Ferguson I'll not be disturbing you

SARAH FERGUSON Well, close the door, then, and don't be talking so much! [*CLUTIE JOHN does as she bids him*] Go up there now by the fire, and content yourself

[CLUTIE sits down in a corner of the fireplace MRS FERGUSON seats herself on the sofa]

ANDREW FERGUSON I saw Witherow going down the loanie I suppose he was in here about the mortgage?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, he was He knows about Hannah and Jimmy

SARAH FERGUSON There was a row between Witherow and Jimmy, and they had a bit of a scuffle Witherow caught a holt of Jimmy and knocked him down, and then Hannah went forward and struck Witherow flat in the face You could have knocked me down with a feather when she did it

ANDREW FERGUSON That was a queer thing for her to do Mebbe she's changed her mind about him She could hardly find a word hard enough for him one time I suppose it's all right It's a load off my mind anyway to hear that the farm's safe, though God knows I'm a poor hand at working it

JOHN FERGUSON You'll get into the way of it in a wee while, son, and mebbe I'll be able to give you more help, now my mind's at ease It's hard on you that was reared for the ministry to have to turn your hand to farming and you not used to it!

ANDREW FERGUSON I daresay it'll do me some sort of good

CLUTIE JOHN Listen! The girl I was telling you about, the one that killed herself, it was because her boy fell out with her That was the cause of it! She cried her eyes out to him, but it made no differs, and so she threw herself off a hill and was killed dead

ANDREW FERGUSON Wheesht, Clutie!

SARAH FERGUSON Dear only knows where you get all them stories from that you're always telling, Clutie!

CLUTIE JOHN I hear them in my travels

SARAH FERGUSON Do you never hear no comic ones?

CLUTIE JOHN Ah, I can't mind the comic ones I just mind the sad ones Them's the easiest to mind They say the man was sorry afterwards when he heard tell she'd killed herself, but sure it was no use being sorry then He should have been sorry before It was a great leap she took

ANDREW FERGUSON What's Jimmy going to do about the mortgage? Is he going to take it on himself or what?

JOHN FERGUSON I suppose so We haven't settled anything He said I could

stay on here, your ma and me, with you to manage the farm

SARAH FERGUSON It's brave and kind of him to do the like

ANDREW FERGUSON I don't see where the kindness comes in if he gets Hannah to marry him over it! I hope to God she's not doing it just to save the farm

JOHN FERGUSON It was her own choice, Andrew, son I said to her I would rather go into the Poorhouse nor have her do anything against her will I'm not saying I'm not glad she's consented to have Jimmy, for that would be a lie I am glad

ANDREW FERGUSON Because the farm's safe, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, Andrew! [They are silent for a few moments] What are you thinking, son? Are you thinking I'm letting her marry Jimmy against her will just to save the farm? Is that what you're thinking?

ANDREW FERGUSON [evasively] I don't know what to think, Da

JOHN FERGUSON I left her to her own choice Didn't I, Sarah?

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, John, you did, and sure what does it matter anyway? She's a young slip of a girl with wayward fancies in her head, mebbe, but Jimmy's as good and substantial a man as she's like to get, and he'll be a good husband to her It's a great thing for a girl to get a comfortable home to go to when she leaves the one she was reared in There's plenty of young women does be running after this and running after that, but sure there's nothing in the end to beat a kind man and a good home where the money is easy and regular

ANDREW FERGUSON It's easy to be saying that, Ma, when you're past your desires

SARAH FERGUSON I got my desire, Andrew, when I got your da I never desired no one else but him

ANDREW FERGUSON Would you like to have married Jimmy Caesar if he'd been your match when you were Hannah's age?

SARAH FERGUSON There was never no question of me marrying any one but your da

ANDREW FERGUSON But if there had—if your da's farm had been mortgaged like this one?

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, what's the good of if-ing and supposing? There's a deal too much of that goes on in this

house And, anyway, we can't let your da be turned out of his home

ANDREW FERGUSON Then that is the reason! Hannah's marrying Jimmy Caesar for our sakes, not for her own!

JOHN FERGUSON No, no, Andrew, son, that's not it I tell you she took him of her own free will 'I wouldn't put no compulsion on her

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da, I know you wouldn't, but are you sure you're not ready to believe she's taking him of her own free will just because she says she is?

SARAH FERGUSON Sure, what else can he do?

JOHN FERGUSON God knows, Andrew, it'll hurt me sore to leave this house, but I'd go gladly out of it sooner nor cause Hannah a moment's unhappiness I'm trying hard to do what's right I don't think I'm acting hypocritically, and I'm not deceiving myself

[The door opens suddenly, and HANNAH enters in a state of agitation She closes the door behind her and then stands with her face to it She begins to sob without restraint]

JOHN FERGUSON *[rising from his chair]* What is it, daughter?

ANDREW FERGUSON *[going to her]* Hannah!

SARAH FERGUSON Don't bother her! *[Going to her and drawing her into her arms]* There, Hannah, dear, don't disturb yourself, daughter *[To the others]* She's overwrought with the excitement That's what it is *[To HANNAH]* Come and sit down, dear!

[She draws HANNAH towards the sofa, where they both sit down HANNAH buries her face in her mother's shoulder and sobs bitterly]

SARAH FERGUSON Control yourself, daughter! You're all right now No one'll harm you here!

JOHN FERGUSON Are you not well, Hannah?

ANDREW FERGUSON *[coming close to his mother and sister]* Hannah, do you not want to marry Jimmy Caesar?

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, wheesht with you, Andrew, and not be putting notions into her head! It's just overwrought she is You know well she's been as anxious about the farm as any of us, and about your da, too, and she bore the bother well, but now that it's all settled, she's had to give way Sure that's natural! There, daughter, dear, just cry away till you're better

[She soothes HANNAH as she speaks to her]

JOHN FERGUSON *[shaking the rug from his legs and going unsteadily to his wife and daughter]* Hannah! *[HANNAH, still sobbing, does not reply]* Hannah, daughter, do you hear me?

HANNAH FERGUSON *[without raising her head]* Ay, Da

JOHN FERGUSON Listen to me a while! *[He tries to raise her face to his]* Look up at me, daughter! *[She turns towards him]* Don't cry, Hannah! I can't bear to see you crying, dear! *[He makes her stand up and then he clasps her to him]* Listen to me, Hannah! I've never deceived you nor been unjust to you, have I, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON No, Da

JOHN FERGUSON And you know I'd beg my bread from door to door sooner nor hurt you, don't you? Isn't that true?

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, Da, it is

JOHN FERGUSON Well, don't be afraid to say what's in your mind, then! What is it that's upsetting you?

HANNAH FERGUSON *[putting her arms about his neck, and drawing herself closer to him]* Oh, Da, I can't I can't!

SARAH FERGUSON You can't what?

JOHN FERGUSON Do you not want to marry Jimmy?

HANNAH FERGUSON *[sobbing anew]* I can't thole him, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON Very well, daughter! That'll be all right! Don't annoy yourself no more about him, dear It'll be all right

HANNAH FERGUSON I tried hard to want him, Da, but I couldn't, and when he bid me good night and tried to kiss me out in the loame, I near died!

JOHN FERGUSON I know, daughter

SARAH FERGUSON *[starting up in fear and anger]* But you promised him, Hannah! John, you're never going to let her break her word to the man?

JOHN FERGUSON Wheesht, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON *[to her son]* Andrew! *[She sees that ANDREW'S sympathies are with HANNAH]* Hannah think shame of yourself!

HANNAH FERGUSON I can't take him Ma I can't!

SARAH FERGUSON Do you want to see your da turned out of the home he was born in, and him o'd and sick and not able to help himself?

JOHN FERGUSON *[angrily]* Quit it, woman, when I tell you!

SARAH FERGUSON What's wrong with the man that she won't take him? There isn't a decenter, quieter fellow in the place, and him never took drink nor played devil's cards in his life There's plenty of girls would give the two eyes out of their head to have the chance of him Martha M'Clurg and Ann Close and Maggie M'Conkey, the whole lot of them, would jump with joy if he was to give a word to them [*she turns on HANNAH*], and what call have you to be setting yourself up when a decent, quiet man offers for you, and you knowing all that depends on it?

ANDREW FERGUSON Ma, that's no way to talk to her!

SARAH FERGUSON I'll say what I want to say

ANDREW FERGUSON You'll say no more If I hear you speaking another word to her like that, I'll walk out of the door and never come back again

SARAH FERGUSON [*sitting down and weeping helplessly*] Oh, you're all again' me, your da and Hannah and you! I'll have to quit the house I was brought to when I was a young girl, and mebbe live in a wee house in the town or go into the Union!

JOHN FERGUSON [*putting HANNAH into his chair*] Sit down, daughter, and quieten yourself [*To his wife*] If we have to go into the Poorhouse, Sarah, we'll have to go [*To his son*] Put on your top-coat, Andrew, and go up to Witherow's and tell him he can take the farm

HANNAH FERGUSON [*recovering herself slightly*] No, Da, no I'm all right again I'll marry Jimmy! I'm ashamed of the way I went on just now My ma was right It was just the upset that made me like it

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, daughter, that was it

JOHN FERGUSON Wheesht, Sarah Go on, Andrew

ANDREW FERGUSON All right, Da

SARAH FERGUSON [*angrily*] Let her go herself and finish her work! The lad's wore out with tiredness

ANDREW FERGUSON I'm not that tired, Ma

HANNAH FERGUSON [*firmly*] I'll go, Andrew It'll quieten me down to have the walk [*To her father*] Jimmy doesn't know yet, Da I didn't tell him, and he's coming up here the night after he shuts his shop Mebbe you'll tell him before I come back?

JOHN FERGUSON All right, daughter,

I will [*To ANDREW*] Hannah'll go, Andrew She doesn't want to be here when Jimmy comes [*To HANNAH*] Put a shawl over your head, daughter, and wrap yourself well from the night air

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, Da!

[*She goes upstairs to make herself ready to go out CLUTIE JOHN makes a faint sound on his whistle*]

JOHN FERGUSON Ah, are you still there, Clutie John? I'd near forgot about you

CLUTIE JOHN Will I play "Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn" to you?

JOHN FERGUSON No, boy, not the night Just keep quiet there in the heat of the fire

CLUTIE JOHN It's a brave warm fire It's well to be them that has a good fire whenever they want it

[*HANNAH, wearing a shawl over her head, comes downstairs and goes across the kitchen to the door*]

JOHN FERGUSON You'll not be long, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON No, Da

[*She opens the door and goes out, closing it behind her*]

JOHN FERGUSON I wonder will Witherow let the farm to some one else or will he till it himself?

ANDREW FERGUSON He'll mebbe till it himself

SARAH FERGUSON I'd better be laying the supper for you all Is Clutie John to have his here?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, let him have a bite to eat We'll mebbe not be able to

[*He breaks off suddenly and turns to his son*] Light the lamp, Andrew, and draw the blinds

[*He seats himself again in his chair*]

ANDREW FERGUSON Draw the blinds, Clutie

[*He lights the lamp while CLUTIE draws the blinds and MRS FERGUSON lays the table for supper*]

ANDREW FERGUSON I wonder what time Jimmy'll come

JOHN FERGUSON I hope he'll come soon so that he won't be here when Hannah comes back

ANDREW FERGUSON Ay Will I set the lamp near your elbow, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son, and reach the Bible to me, if you please [*ANDREW hands the Bible to him*] Thank you, son

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

It is more than an hour later, and it is quite dark outside JOHN FERGUSON and his wife and son are sitting at the table, eating their supper CLUTIE JOHN MCGRATH is still seated in the corner of the fireplace He has laid his whistle aside and is engaged in eating the supper given to him by MRS FERGUSON

SARAH FERGUSON Hannah's gey and long in getting back from Witherow's

JOHN FERGUSON Ay

SARAH FERGUSON I wonder did she change her mind about Jimmy and go to the shop instead of going to Witherow's It's quare him not coming before this!

ANDREW FERGUSON Ah, I don't think she'd do that Hannah's not the sort to change sudden

SARAH FERGUSON Well, she changed sudden enough the night!

ANDREW FERGUSON Ah, that was because she was doing something she didn't want to do

SARAH FERGUSON Well, if she hasn't changed her mind, and Jimmy comes now, we'll have to give him his supper, and then Hannah'll mebbe be here before he goes away again It'll be quare and awkward for us all

ANDREW FERGUSON Well, sure, you can tell him when he comes, and then he'll not be wanting to stop to his supper

SARAH FERGUSON Och, we'd have to offer the man something to eat anyway! It's only neighborly to do that much [*She turns to CLUTIE JOHN*] Will you have some more tea, Clutie?

CLUTIE JOHN Ay, if you please, Mrs Ferguson It's quare nice tea I don't often get the like of that any place I go

ANDREW FERGUSON It's a quare thing to me the way Jimmy runs after Hannah and her showing him plain enough that she never had any regard for him

CLUTIE JOHN 'Deed, Andrew, there's many a thing in the world is quarer nor that It's a quare thing now for a man to be blowing wind into a bit of a pipe and it to be making tunes for him That's quare if you like!

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, you're daft about that old whistle of yours! [*She hands a cup of tea to him*] Here, drink up that, and don't talk so much! I suppose I'll have to let you sleep in the loft the night?

CLUTIE JOHN Sure, that'll be a grand bed for me, lying on the hay

SARAH FERGUSON I do believe you're not such a fool as you make out Clutie! You've the fine knack of gettin' into people's houses and making them give you your meals and a bed without them meaning to do it!

CLUTIE JOHN I don't try to make them do it, Mrs Ferguson I just come in the house and sit down That's all I do

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, that's all you do If you did any more, they'd mebbe have to keep you for the rest of your life! Once you're settled down, it's hard to persuade you to get up again

CLUTIE JOHN You're letting on you're vexed with me, Mrs Ferguson, but sure I know rightly you're not A woman that has as kind a heart as you have

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, wheesht with your talk! Will I cut another piece for you?

CLUTIE JOHN Ay, if you please!

[*She cuts a piece of bread and gives it to him*]

ANDREW FERGUSON I wonder, Da, would you be willing to go up to Belfast to live? I think I could mebbe get a place in a linen office there, and I daresay Hannah might get work in a wareroom or a shop Between the two of us, we could keep my ma and you rightly

JOHN FERGUSON I'd be as willing to go there as anywhere, son, if I have to quit out of this

ANDREW FERGUSON When I was thinking of going into the ministry, I got acquainted with a young fellow named M'Kinstry that was very well connected His da kept a linen mill in Belfast, and I daresay he'd be willing to put a word in for me if I was to ask him

JOHN FERGUSON Ay

ANDREW FERGUSON I think I'll go up to Belfast on Saturday and see young M'Kinstry I'll write a letter to him the night to tell him I'm coming, and I'll just let him know the position of things so that he can tell his da about me

SARAH FERGUSON [*to ANDREW*] Will I pour you out a wee drop more tea, son?

ANDREW FERGUSON Thank you, Ma

[*She takes his cup and fills it, and then passes it back to him*]

JOHN FERGUSON Who knows but my health will be better in Belfast nor it has been here? I'm not sure, when I think of it, but the mists that lie on the hills at

night are bad for me. They say there's a fine air in Belfast blowing up the Lough from the sea.

[There is a knock at the door.]

SARAH FERGUSON There's some one at the door now. It'll either be Hannah or Jimmy. Clutie, John, away and open it, will you?

[CLUTIE JOHN goes to the door and opens it. JAMES CAESAR steps in. The assured manner which he assumed when HANNAH accepted him has become more pronounced.]

JAMES CAESAR I'm later nor I expected to be. *[He turns to CLUTIE.]* Here, Clutie, help me off with my coat, will you? *[CLUTIE JOHN helps him to take off his overcoat.]* It's turned a bit cold the night! *[To CLUTIE.]* Hang it up there on the rack, Clutie. *[CLUTIE does as he is bid, and then goes to his seat by the fire.]* I thought it would be as well to wear my top-coat, for you get quare and damp coming up the loane in the mist! *[He goes to the fire and rubs his hands in the warmth.]* Where's Hannah?

SARAH FERGUSON She's out, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR Out, is she? It's very late for her to be out! She'll have to keep better hours nor this when she's married, eh? *[His attempt to be jovial falls heavy.]* Has she not had her supper yet?

SARAH FERGUSON No, not yet. We're expecting her in every while.

JAMES CAESAR I hope she'll not be long. I want to discuss the wedding with her.

SARAH FERGUSON The wedding!

JAMES CAESAR Ay, Sure, there's no sense in our waiting long, is there? If people's able to get married, they ought to get the ceremony over quick. That's what I think, Mrs. Ferguson. Och, listen to me calling you Mrs. Ferguson, just like a stranger! I ought to start calling you "Ma" to get into the way of it, or would you rather I called you "Mother"?

SARAH FERGUSON *[nervously]* I'm not particular, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR Some people's quare and particular about a thing like that. They think it's common to say "Ma" and "Da," and they never let their children call them anything but "Father" and "Mother." I knew a family once up in Belfast that always called their parents "Papa" and "Mamma." It was quare and conceited of them—just as if they were English or anything like that.

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy, I want to say something to you!

JAMES CAESAR Ay, John! *[Jovially.]* I can't start calling you "Da" or "Papa" or anything else but John, can I? *[To MRS. FERGUSON.]* Do you know I'm near dead of the drouth! If you could spare me a wee drop of tea!

SARAH FERGUSON *[rising and speaking hurriedly]* Of course, Jimmy, I will. I don't know what I'm thinking about not to ask you to sit down to your supper. *[She goes to the dresser for a cup and saucer.]* Draw a chair up to the table, will you, and sit down!

JAMES CAESAR Ah, now, I don't want to be putting you to any inconvenience.

SARAH FERGUSON Sure, it's no bother at all. Just come and content yourself. I'm all thorougher with the ups and downs we've had this day, and my manners is all shattered over the head of it. Sit down here.

JAMES CAESAR *[taking his place at the table]* Thank you, Ma.

SARAH FERGUSON Will you have soda-bread or wheaten?

JAMES CAESAR Wheaten, if you please!

[ANDREW FERGUSON rises from the table and goes to the side of the fire opposite to that on which CLUTIE JOHN is seated.]

SARAH FERGUSON Help yourself to anything you want.

JAMES CAESAR Thank you! *[He bows his head.]* Thank God for this meal, Amen! *[To JOHN FERGUSON.]* I've been making plans in my head, John, about the future of the farm.

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy, I want to say something to you!

JAMES CAESAR *[slightly impatient]* Ay, but wait till I tell you about my plans! Now, how would it be if you were to let the land by itself, and you and the rest of you stay on in the house? Me and Hannah'll be getting married in a wee while, and there'll only be the three of you left.

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR Now, let me get it all out before I forget any of it. Andrew could maybe resume his studies for the ministry. I might be able to advance him the money for it.

ANDREW FERGUSON That's a kindly thought, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR Ah, I've often thought I would like to be related to a minister. It looks well 'o be able to say the Reverend Mr. So-and-So is your

brother-in-law, particular if he's a well-known man such as you might be yourself, Andrew Or I was thinking if you didn't fancy the ministry any more, mebbe you'd come into the shop and learn the grocery! The fact is, betwixt ourselves, I'm thinking seriously of opening a branch establishment over at Ballymaclurg, and if I had you trained under me, Andrew, you'd do rightly as the manager of it.

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy, I'll never be able to thank you sufficient for your kindness.

JAMES CAESAR Ah, don't mention it! Sure, it's a pleasure, and anyway it's in the family, you might say! I wonder what's keeping Hannah! Where is she at all?

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy Hannah's changed her mind!

JAMES CAESAR Changed her mind! What do you mean?

JOHN FERGUSON She's changed her mind, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*getting up and going to him the assured manner has dropped from him*] Do you mean she doesn't want to marry me no more?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, that's what I mean.

JAMES CAESAR But! Ah, quit your coddling, for dear sake! [*He goes back to his seat and begins to eat again*] You've been letting Clutie John put you up to this—trying to scare me! I wouldn't wonder but Hannah's upstairs all the while, splitting her sides [*He gets up and goes to the foot of the staircase and calls up it*] Hi, Hannah, are you there?

CLUTIE JOHN I never put them up to anything, Mr Caesar It's not my nature to do a thing like that.

JAMES CAESAR [*calling up the stairs*] Come on down out of that, Hannah, and not be tormenting me!

JOHN FERGUSON She's not there, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR [*coming back to the table*] Are you in earnest, John?

JOHN FERGUSON I am, Jimmy I'm quare and sorry for you.

JAMES CAESAR But she gave her promise to me an hour ago! you heard her yourself!

JOHN FERGUSON I know, but she's changed her mind since.

JAMES CAESAR What's come over her?

JOHN FERGUSON I can't tell you, Jimmy She just didn't feel that she could

go on with the match It's a thing that you can't explain, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR But the farm and the mortgage!

JOHN FERGUSON When I saw the way her mind was set, I told her to go up to Witherow's and tell him to foreclose!

JAMES CAESAR But, man alive!

JOHN FERGUSON That's the way of it, Jimmy I'm heartsore about it, but it can't be helped, can it?

JAMES CAESAR [*angrily*] Do you mean to sit there and tell me you're going to let her treat me like dirt beneath her feet after the way I've offered to help you?

JOHN FERGUSON I can't force her to do things against her will, Jimmy No good would come of the like of that either to her or to you.

JAMES CAESAR I suppose you never thought of my position, John Ferguson? I've told all my neighbors already that Hannah and me are to be married, and now I'll have to tell them that she won't have me!

ANDREW FERGUSON My da can't help it, can he, if Hannah doesn't want to marry you?

JAMES CAESAR What'll Witherow say when he hears about it? My God, he'll be the first to know! [*He becomes wild with rage as this idea expands in his mind*] Had you no consideration at all, the whole pack of you? I was willing to cripple myself to get you out of your difficulty, and then you turn on me and affront me before the man I hate most in the world! That's kindness for you! That's the reward a man gets for being neighborly!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, you may well complain, Jimmy! I'm not denying your right to do so I'd have spared you from this if I could.

JAMES CAESAR Can't you make her keep her promise to me? A man has the right to be respected by his own child, and if she doesn't obey you and do what you tell her, you should make her.

ANDREW FERGUSON Would you marry a woman that doesn't want you?

JAMES CAESAR [*fiercely*] I want her, don't I? What does it matter to me whether she wants me or not so long as I'm married to her? My heart's hungry for her! [*His ferocity passes into complaint*] Don't I know rightly she doesn't want me? But what does that matter to me? I've loved her since she was a wee child, and I'd be happy with her if she was never to give me a kind look Many and many a time,

when the shop was closed, I went and sat out there in the fields and imagined her and me married together and living happy, us with two or three wee children, and them growing up fine and strong I could see her them times walking about in a fine silk dress, and looking grand on it, and all the neighbors nudging each other and saying the fine woman she was and the well we must be getting on in the world for her to be able to dress herself that nice! I could hardly bear it when I used to meet her afterwards, and she hadn't hardly a civil word for me, but I couldn't keep out of her way for all that, and many's a time I run quick and dodged round corners so's I should meet her again and have the pleasure of looking at her. When she said she'd have me, I could feel big lumps rolling off me, and I was light-hearted and happy for all I knew she was only consenting to have me to save your farm, John I had my heart's desire, and I never felt so like a man before! And now!

[He rests his head on the table and begins to sob.]

SARAH FERGUSON *[in anguish]* I can't bear to see a man crying! *[She goes to JIMMY]* Quit, Jimmy, son! It'll mebbe be all right in the end. Don't disturb yourself so much, man!

ANDREW FERGUSON *[contemptuously]* There's no sense in going on that way!

JOHN FERGUSON Don't speak to him, Andrew! Leave the man to his grief!

JAMES CAESAR *[looking up, and addressing ANDREW]* I know rightly I'm making a poor show of myself, but I can't help it. Wouldn't anybody that's had the life that I've had do the same as me? You're right and fine, Andrew, and full of your talk, but wait till you've had to bear what I have, and you'll see then what you'll do when something good that you've longed for all your life comes to you and then is taken from you. *[He rises from the table, trying to recover himself and speak in an ordinary voice.]* I'm sorry I bothered you all! I'll not trouble you with my company any longer. It'll be better for me to be going nor to be here when she comes back. *[He moves towards the door.]* I said some harsh words to you, John!

JOHN FERGUSON I'm not minding them, Jimmy I know well the state you're in

JAMES CAESAR. I'm sorry I said them

to you, all the same. It was in anger I said them.

[CLUTIE JOHN starts up from his seat in the corner, and holds up his hand for silence.]

CLUTIE JOHN Wheesht!

SARAH FERGUSON What is it, Clutie?

CLUTIE JOHN Wheesht, wheesht!

[He goes to the door and opens, while the others stand staring at him. He listens for a moment or two, and then he darts swiftly into the darkness.]

SARAH FERGUSON In the name of God, what ails the fellow?

ANDREW FERGUSON *[going to the door]* He's heard something.

SARAH FERGUSON *[drawing a blind and peering out]* Oh, what is it?

ANDREW FERGUSON *[looking out]* I can't see anything. Wait! *[He pauses a moment.]* There's some one coming up the loane. I hear steps.

JAMES CAESAR *[coming to his side and listening]* It's some one running!

ANDREW FERGUSON Ay! It's Hannah! *[He shouts to his sister.]* What ails you, Hannah?

JAMES CAESAR I hope nothing's happened to her.

SARAH FERGUSON She must have been scared or something. *[She goes to the door and stands beside CAESAR. ANDREW FERGUSON is heard outside speaking inquiries to his sister. Then CAESAR and MRS FERGUSON come away from the door into the kitchen, and HANNAH, in a state of terrible agitation, appears in the doorway. She pauses wildly for a moment, glancing round the room without seeing anything because of the sudden change from darkness to light.]* Hannah, what ails you, dear?

[HANNAH goes quickly to her father and throws herself against his knees.]

HANNAH FERGUSON Da, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON What is it, daughter? What is it?

[ANDREW FERGUSON, followed by CLUTIE JOHN, returns to the kitchen. He closes the door.]

ANDREW FERGUSON What ails her? Has she hurt herself?

JOHN FERGUSON Hannah! *[He tries to lift her face to his, but she resists him.]* Hannah, what is it? Tell me, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON *[brokenly]* Da, Da, I can't!

JOHN FERGUSON You can't what, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON It's it's fearful, Da!

JAMES CAESAR Has any one harmed her? Hannah, has any one harmed you? [To JOHN FERGUSON] She was at Witherow's, wasn't she? [Turning to the others] That's where she was—at Witherow's! [To HANNAH] Hannah, do you hear me, girl? Has any one harmed you? Was it Witherow?

HANNAH FERGUSON I can't can't

JAMES CAESAR You must tell us [Looking wildly about him] My God, I'll go mad if any harm's happened to her!

ANDREW FERGUSON [taking hold of his arm and leading him away from HANNAH] Quieten yourself, Jimmy She'll tell us in a minute when she's herself again

JOHN FERGUSON Hannah, dear! Come closer to me, daughter! [He lifts her head from his knees and draws her up so that her face rests against his] Just keep quiet, daughter! No one'll harm you here Keep quite quiet! [To JAMES CAESAR] She was always a wee bit afeard of the dark, for she has a great imagination, and she mebbe thought she saw something fearful in the night Get her a wee sup of sweet milk, one of you! [MRS FERGUSON goes to get the milk for her] It's mebbe nothing but fright I've seen her as startled as this once before when she was a child [HANNAH gives a great sob, and starts a little] There, daughter, you needn't be scared! You're safe here from any harm [MRS FERGUSON brings a cup of milk to him] Thank you, Sarah! Here, Hannah, drink a wee sup of this! It'll do you good!

HANNAH FERGUSON [clinging closer to him] No, Da, no!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, daughter, it'll help to steady you! [He puts the cup to her lips, and she drinks some of the milk] That's right! That's right! You'll have a wee drop more, now! [She averts her head] Ay, daughter, just have some more, and then you'll mebbe be quieter in yourself [He compels her to drink some more of the milk, and then he puts the cup away] That'll do you a power of good! [He draws her head down to his breast] Just rest your head on me, daughter, and keep still!

CLUTIE JOHN She was crying bitter out there She was running up the loanie when I found her, and she let a screech out of her when I touched her arm, and then she run that hard I couldn't keep pace

with her It must have been a fearful thing that scared her that way!

SARAH FERGUSON I hope to my goodness it's no more sorrow for us We've had more nor our share already

JOHN FERGUSON Wheesht, wheesht, woman Wheesht!

JAMES CAESAR If Witherow's harmed her, I'll kill him I will, so help me, God!

JOHN FERGUSON Quit, quit! [To HANNAH] Are you better now, Hannah? [She still sobs a little, but her agitation has subsided, and she is now able to speak more or less coherently] Just tell me, daughter What happened you?

HANNAH FERGUSON Da, I'm ashamed!

JOHN FERGUSON Ashamed, daughter!

SARAH FERGUSON She said she was ashamed! Oh, my God!

JOHN FERGUSON What are you ashamed of, daughter?

HANNAH FERGUSON I [She relapses] I can't tell you, Da, I can't tell you!

JAMES CAESAR Was it Witherow, Hannah?

JOHN FERGUSON Don't bother her Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR I know it was Witherow, I know it was him!

JOHN FERGUSON Hannah! Look up, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON Yes, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON Tell me about it!

HANNAH FERGUSON [making an effort to control herself, now and then speaking brokenly] I went up to Witherow's farm, the way you told me, and there were two people waiting to talk to him

JOHN FERGUSON Ay

HANNAH FERGUSON He kept me waiting till after he had done with them I told him we couldn't pay the money and he was to foreclose, and then he began laughing at me and making a mock of of Jimmy

[She looks up and sees CAESAR and hesitates to finish her sentence]

JAMES CAESAR Was it me he made a mock of? [To JOHN FERGUSON] Ah, didn't I tell you what he would do? Didn't I, now? [He turns to the others] Didn't I, Mrs Ferguson?

JOHN FERGUSON Go on, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON He said he supposed it couldn't be helped, and I was just coming away when he said he would walk the length of the loanie with me, and I waited for him [Her voice grows feeble]

We were walking along, talking about one thing and another

JOHN FERGUSON [*nervously*] Ay, ay!

HANNAH FERGUSON And he begun telling me what a fine girl I am, and wishing he could kiss me!

JAMES CAESAR God starve him!

HANNAH FERGUSON And then he tried to kiss me, but I wouldn't let him. We were going over Musgrave's meadow together, and all of a sudden he put his arms round me and threw me down!

Oh, Da, Da!

[*Her grief overcomes her again, and she buries her head against his breast and is unable to speak further*]

JAMES CAESAR What did she say, John? What was it she said?

JOHN FERGUSON [*brokenly*] I can't speak Jimmy—I can't speak Hannah, dear!

[*He tries to comfort her*]

JAMES CAESAR Did he wrong her? That's what I want to know!

SARAH FERGUSON Oh, will we never have comfort in the world! John, does she mean that he harmed her *harmed* her? [*Wildly to the others*] One of you do something! Andrew! Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR I've sworn many's a time to have his life and never done it. I was a poor, trembling creature, but I'll tremble no more! [*He goes to the door*] Good night to you all!

JOHN FERGUSON Where are you going, Jimmy?

JAMES CAESAR I'm going—somewhere!

JOHN FERGUSON Sit down, Jimmy

JAMES CAESAR It's no good you talking to me, John!

[*He opens the door violently and goes out*]

JOHN FERGUSON Andrew, go after him and bring him back. There's enough harm done already. Go and stop him, son!

[*ANDREW goes unwillingly to the door. He stands there looking up the dark lane*]

ANDREW FERGUSON I can't see him!

JOHN FERGUSON You must be able to see him. He can't be that far! Go after him, man, and bring him back here.

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da, I won't. [*He shuts the door and returns to his seat*] The man has a right to be left to himself.

JOHN FERGUSON Andrew! [*He tries*

to get up from his chair, but HANNAH'S weight prevents him] Here, Sarah, take Hannah and put her to bed. Get up, daughter!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*clinging to him*] Da, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, daughter, ay! God's scourged us hard, and it isn't easy to bear. We must just just try and be patient. [*Kissing her*] Go to your ma, dear, and let her take care of you!

SARAH FERGUSON Come to your bed, Hannah!

[*HANNAH'S anguish unbalances her, and she becomes hysterical, and stands clinging to her father and weeping bitterly*]

JOHN FERGUSON [*comforting her*] You must control yourself, daughter. Go with your ma, now, like a good girl. Take her, Sarah!

[*MRS FERGUSON leads her daughter towards the stairs. They go out*]

ANDREW FERGUSON I hope Jimmy'll kill him.

JOHN FERGUSON [*weakly*] Son, son, don't talk that way!

ANDREW FERGUSON I can't help it, Da. He ought to be killed. He's not fit to live.

JOHN FERGUSON Are you setting yourself up to judge God's work?

ANDREW FERGUSON An eye for an eye, Da, and a tooth for a tooth!

JOHN FERGUSON That's not the spirit that lives now, son! That's the spirit that was destroyed on the Cross. If a man does an injury to you, and you injure him back, you're as bad as he is. You have your own work to do in the world, and you must leave God to do His, it's His work to judge, not ours! [*His utterance exhausts him a little, and he staggers back into his chair. His voice changes to a pleading note*] Ah, Andrew, son, don't never talk that way again! I meant you for the ministry, to teach people how to live for God! You can't go into the ministry now, son, but you can teach people just the same. Just the same! I would rather you were dead nor hear you speak about Jimmy Caesar the way you're doing.

[*He gets up from his chair and goes to his son, taking him by the shoulder*] Will you not go out and look for him, son? He has suffered enough, poor man, without him damning his soul!

ANDREW FERGUSON He can bear God's strokes as well as we can!

JOHN FERGUSON Your heart's bitter, son! I wish I could go! [*He staggers*

towards the door] I haven't the strength I used to have Andrew, will you not do as I bid you?

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da, I won't interfere between them

JOHN FERGUSON I must go myself, then I must try and find him

[MRS FERGUSON comes down the stairs into the kitchen]

SARAH FERGUSON John!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON Hannah wants you She'll not be quiet without you near her

JOHN FERGUSON I can't go up to her yet, Sarah I'm going out to look for Jimmy Caesar I can't let him be wandering about wild in the night If he finds Witherow he'll mebbe do him an injury [He turns towards the door again] Andrew won't go, so I must I can't let the man destroy himself

SARAH FERGUSON What way's that to be talling and you the sick you are? Is it your death you're wanting? And no coat on or nothing [To her son] Andrew, think shame of yourself to be letting your da go out in the dark and damp! [To her husband] You must come to Hannah She won't keep still without you! [To ANDREW] You go and look for Jimmy, Andrew The poor creature's near distracted mad, and dear knows in that state he might do something fearful

ANDREW FERGUSON [sullenly] I'm not going, Ma I've told my da that already

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, aren't you headstrong? [To her husband] Come up to Hannah first, John!

JOHN FERGUSON She must wait till I come back It's Jimmy Caesar that's in the greatest danger now I'll come to her when I get back, tell her!

SARAH FERGUSON You'll rue this night, the pair of you, but you must have your own way, I suppose!

JOHN FERGUSON Give me my coat, woman! [MRS FERGUSON goes to get his coat for him] Andrew, will you not come with me and help me to find him?

ANDREW FERGUSON I'll not budge out of the door, Da I wouldn't lift a finger to stop him from doing anything he wants to do [MRS FERGUSON returns to the kitchen carrying a jacket, a top-coat, and a muffler] It's no business of mine to interfere between them

SARAH FERGUSON [helping her husband into his coat] Muffle yourself up well, John It's cold the night!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, Sarah, thank you

[He puts the muffler round his throat]

ANDREW FERGUSON I only hope Jimmy'll have the manhood to kill Witherow!

JOHN FERGUSON [in pain] Wheesht, wheesht, son! Wheesht, adear! [He recovers himself, and turns to his wife] Tell Hannah where I'm gone, Sarah! That'll mebbe keep her quiet till I get back! [He opens the door] I'll come as soon as I can!

[He goes out, closing the door behind him]

SARAH FERGUSON It'll kill him, this night's work! Andrew, how can you stand there and see your da going out in the wet and dark, and you knowing well the sick and feeble he is!

ANDREW FERGUSON I can't stop him from going, can I?

SARAH FERGUSON You could have gone yourself

ANDREW FERGUSON [turning to her and speaking fiercely] I tell you I don't want to stop Jimmy from killing Witherow if he's going to do it It's right that he should kill him The man's bad from head to foot Everything about him shows that! It isn't only the way he's treated us, but others too You've told me yourself many's a time, and my da's told me too, of the cuts and insults Jimmy's had to bear from him! Isn't this greater nor the lot of them put together? Hasn't Jimmy a right to turn on him now if he never had the right before? I don't care what my da says! Jimmy has the right to turn on him and kill him if he can

SARAH FERGUSON [bewildered by the catastrophe in which she is involved] I'm all moidhered by it I don't understand what's happening Your da says it's the will of God, but I I can't make it out [She goes towards the stairs] I'll mebbe not come down again, Andrew Good night, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON Good night, Ma!

[MRS FERGUSON goes upstairs ANDREW walks across the room and opens the door He looks out for a moment or two Then he shuts the door and walks back to the fireplace]

CLUTIE JOHN Your da's a forgiving man, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON [absently] Eh?

CLUTIE JOHN I say, your da's a forgiving man!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*carelessly*] Oh, ay Ay!

[*He walks across the room and back again*]

CLUTIE JOHN You're not a forgiving man, are you, Andrew?

[*ANDREW sits down at the table He does not reply to CLUTIE JOHN*]

CLUTIE JOHN You're not a forgiving man, are you, Andrew? [*He gets up and comes to the table*] You wouldn't forgive till seventy times seven, would you?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*impatiently*] Ah, quit!

CLUTIE JOHN Your da has a quare good nature He always says you should turn the other cheek to the man that harms you That's a great spirit to have, that, isn't it?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*who has not been listening*] Eh? What's that you say?

CLUTIE JOHN I was talking about your da, Andrew, and him having the great fine spirit of forgiveness in him

ANDREW FERGUSON [*indifferently*] Oh, ay! Ay!

CLUTIE JOHN I could never be as forgiving as your da if I lived to be a thousand years old [*He pauses for a moment, and then says, eagerly*] Will I play something to you? [*ANDREW does not make any movement*] Are you not listening to me?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*crossly*] Ah, what is it? What's the matter with you?

CLUTIE JOHN Will I not play something to you? It's a great comfort when you're in trouble to hear a man playing a tune

ANDREW FERGUSON [*sharply*] Quit blethering!

CLUTIE JOHN [*going back to his seat at the fire*] I was only wondering could I do anything to please you, Andrew? But I'll keep still and quiet I'll not disturb you at all

[*They sit in silence for a few moments*]

CLUTIE JOHN He's a bad man, that man Witherow! That's what he is! He has a sour nature in him Whenever he meets me he makes a mock of me and says, "When are they going to put you in the asylum, Clutie?" Sometimes he hits me with his stick or a whip mebbe He done that the day there fornted your own door, Andrew! He couped me into the hedge and near broke my whistle on me That shows the bad-natured man he is to be hurting a poor fellow like myse'f that has to beg h's bread from door to door!

ANDREW FERGUSON Ho'd your tongue, will you?

CLUTIE JOHN [*meekly*] All right, Andrew! I was only saying what he done to me, but, sure, it doesn't matter what he does to the like of me, a poor senseless fellow that wanders the world with a whistle! It's quare and different, Andrew, when he does harm to a girl like Hannah

ANDREW FERGUSON [*tuning to him and speaking quickly*] Ay, it is different, Clutie! You're right there My sister is the finest girl in the County Down

CLUTIE JOHN [*eagerly*] Ay, she is, Andrew She is in sang There isn't her equal in the province of Ulster There is not I've oftentimes heard peop'e talking about her, and saying what a fine match she'll make for some man, and one time I tried to make up a song about her to be singing on the roads, but I couldn't do it with any satisfaction to myself I'm no hand at making up poetry She's a fine young girl and a great companion she'll be to any one

ANDREW FERGUSON It's only a fine man that's fit for her

CLUTIE JOHN That's true! [*He gets up and comes to the table and leans across it*] It would never have done if she'd married Jimmy Caesar The mountains can never consort with the hills

ANDREW FERGUSON No! No!! I wasn't pleased about the match when I heard of it

CLUTIE JOHN He's not much of a man, Jimmy Caesar!

ANDREW FERGUSON No, he isn't, indeed!

CLUTIE JOHN He's a poor-natured man, that's what he is He'd be worse nor Witherow if he had the pluck Mebbe he is worse nor him, for he has no pluck at all He's a mean man

ANDREW FERGUSON I daresay you're right

[*He goes to the fire and stands with his back to it*]

CLUTIE JOHN Ay, I am He'd beat you on the ground that lad would, but he would run away from you if you were to stand up to him That's the kind he is

ANDREW FERGUSON Ah, well, he's had a poor life of it

CLUTIE JOHN He'd have been mean-natured whatever kind of a life he had, Andrew! I've seen men like him before in my time They think I'm a fool and see nothing, but when I'm playing my whistle Andrew, I see them when they're not think-

ing I'm looking at them—and there's plenty of them, high up and low down, that are crawling when they're at your feet and are ready to crawl when they're standing up That's the way of them A man like Jimmy Caesar would be a poor defender for Harnah!

ANDREW FERGUSON Mebbe he would!

CLUTIE JOHN I'd be afeard to trust myself to him if I was in need of a person to take care of me I would so

ANDREW FERGUSON Ah, you can take care of yourself! Quit talking now, or if you can't keep quiet, go out to the hayloft and talk to yourself

[He goes half-way across the room and then returns to the fire He stands with his face to it]

CLUTIE JOHN *[after a pause]* I wonder will Jimmy Caesar kill Witherow!

ANDREW FERGUSON What makes you wonder that?

CLUTIE JOHN I was just wondering! *[He turns towards the door]* I'd better be going to my bed It was kind of your ma to give me leave to sleep in the loft It'll be nice and comfortable to stretch myself out on the hay

ANDREW FERGUSON Ay Good night

CLUTIE JOHN Good night to you, Andrew *[He looks back to his seat]* Ah, dear bless us, I was near forgetting my whistle! *[He goes to his seat and picks up the whistle]* It's not a great deal to look at, but it can play a grand tune! *[He puts it in his pocket]* I wouldn't be surprised but Caesar doesn't do it!

ANDREW FERGUSON *[abstractedly]* Doesn't do what?

CLUTIE JOHN Kill Witherow

ANDREW FERGUSON What makes you think that?

CLUTIE JOHN It's the way of him to be talking and not doing

ANDREW FERGUSON Ah, man, but this is different

CLUTIE JOHN You can't help your nature, Andrew No one can Jimmy Caesar's always been afeard of Henry Witherow, and it's likely he always will be He can't help it, God be good to him!

ANDREW FERGUSON *[thinking this over for a second, and then turning away contemptuously]* Ah, you don't know what you're talking about!

CLUTIE JOHN No No, Andrew, that's true! I have no sense in my head at all I've oftentimes been told that Good night again to you Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON Good night!

CLUTIE JOHN *[before he reaches the door]* Mind you, Jimmy Caesar'll mean to kill him! I daresay he will And mebbe he would have killed him if he had been standing forment him that minute, with his back turned, but he had to go out and find him, Andrew! It's a good step from here to Witherow's farm, and he had to get a gun or something You have time to think when you're going that length

ANDREW FERGUSON Ay

CLUTIE JOHN I wouldn't doubt but he went home I daresay he's lying huddled up in his bed this minute, Andrew, and your poor old da hunting for him in the dark, and your sister up there weeping her eyes out

ANDREW FERGUSON Ah, quit, man quit! You're tormenting me with your talk

CLUTIE JOHN A fine girl like Hannah to be depending on Jimmy Caesar for a man

ANDREW FERGUSON Go on with you, go on!

CLUTIE JOHN And him mebbe at home all the time, snuggled up in his bed!

ANDREW FERGUSON What do you mean, Clutie? What are you trying to prove?

CLUTIE JOHN Prove? Me? Sure, I couldn't prove anything if I was paid to do it I'm no hand at proving things That's why I haven't got any sense

ANDREW FERGUSON *[going to him and taking hold of his shoulder]* What's all this talk about Jimmy Caesar mean? You have some meaning in your mind!

CLUTIE JOHN I wish I had, but sure I'll never be right, never I'll always be quare

ANDREW FERGUSON *[turning away from him in disgust]* Och, away with you! *[He goes back to the fire, standing with his face to it]* You have as much talk as Jimmy Caesar himself!

[CLUTIE JOHN stands still for a few moments Then he steps lightly across the floor to where ANDREW is sitting and taps him on the shoulder]

CLUTIE JOHN Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON What ails you now?

CLUTIE JOHN Supposing Jimmy Caesar doesn't kill Witherow?

ANDREW FERGUSON Well? Well, well?

CLUTIE JOHN That 'u'd be fearful wouldn't it? Can't you picture Witherow

sitting up there in his hungry house laughing to himself

ANDREW FERGUSON My God, Clutie!

CLUTIE JOHN And mebbe saying he'll look out for Hannah again!

ANDREW FERGUSON Aw, my God, my God!

CLUTIE JOHN And making a mock of Jimmy Caesar, the way he always does, and calling him an old Jenny-Jo that'll stand by and let another man do harm to his girl

ANDREW FERGUSON Ah, wheesht with you, wheesht!

CLUTIE JOHN And telling people about it! Ay, telling people about it! You can see him with his great jaw hanging down and him roaring with laughter and telling them all in Jefferson public-house on the fair-day!

ANDREW FERGUSON Ay, indeed, that's what he'd do!

CLUTIE JOHN That's what he done over the head of Martha Foley that had the child to him Didn't I hear him myself, telling them all about it, and them splitting their sides and calling him the great lad and the gallous boy and the terrible man for women? And then mebbe him to be telling them how your da, that's near his death, went out to try and stop Jimmy from killing him, and all the while your da was tumbling over the dark fields Jimmy was lying trembling with fright in his bed, afeard to move

ANDREW FERGUSON He'd never be such a collic as that, Clutie He couldn't for shame

CLUTIE JOHN [*coming nearer to him*] If I was Hannah's brother I'd make sure! ANDREW FERGUSON Make sure! What do you mean?

CLUTIE JOHN Ah, what do I mean? Sure, I don't know what I'm saying half my time! I'm all throughother I don't know what I mean, Andrew, I don't know God reward you, and I'll bid you good night I'll go up to the loft and play a while to myself Sure, I'll disturb no one there but the cows mebbe in the byre, and God knows the poor beasts'll not complain if a poor fellow like myself has a small diversion And when I lie down and stretch myself in the hay, I can be thinking, mebbe Jimmy Caesar is lying in a fine warm bed, and be pitying your da that's out looking for him, and be cursing Henry Witherow that's mebbe laughing now and making up great stories to be telling on the fair-day

ANDREW FERGUSON Are you trying to drive me demented?

CLUTIE JOHN Wheesht, wheesht!

[*MRS FERGUSON comes down the stairs*]

SARAH FERGUSON Will you not keep quiet, the pair of you? I'm trying hard to get Hannah asleep, but the clatter you're making would wake the dead! Is your da not back yet, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Ma, not yet!

SARAH FERGUSON [*picking up JIMMY CAESAR'S coat*] Dear bless us, Jimmy left his coat behind him He'll be sure to get his death of cold, for he always had a delicate chest [*She puts the coat aside*] I wish you'd go and find your da, Andrew, and bring him home It's no time of the night for him to be wandering about in the cold air Hannah'll never rest without him near her Will you not go now and find him, son?

ANDREW FERGUSON All right, Ma!

SARAH FERGUSON That's a good son Tell him to come home as quick as he can Clutie John'll stay here while you look for him [*She listens for a moment*] That's Hannah crying again! I can't leave her for a minute but she begins lamenting

[*She goes hurriedly upstairs again ANDREW goes to the door and looks out*]

He is followed by CLUTIE JOHN

CLUTIE JOHN Look, Andrew, there's a light in Witherow's window Do you see it over there on the side of the hill? It shines down the valley a long way Do you see it, Andrew?

ANDREW FERGUSON Ay

CLUTIE JOHN It doesn't look as if Jimmy'd got there, does it? The light's still shining

ANDREW FERGUSON He might be there for all that

CLUTIE JOHN Mebbe! Ay, mebbe! Well, I'll away on now to my bed The night's turned sharp, and I feel tired and sleepy [*He stands in the doorway, gazing up at the sky*] There's a lot of wee stars out the night, Andrew, but no moon

ANDREW FERGUSON Ay

CLUTIE JOHN I oftentimes think it must be quare and lonely up in the sky Good night to you, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON Good night, Clutie

[*CLUTIE JOHN goes out ANDREW FERGUSON stands still, watching the light in WITHEROW'S window Then a great anger goes over him He mutters something to himself, and turns*]

suddenly into the kitchen He takes down the gun and after examining it to see if it is loaded, he goes out In a few minutes SARAH FERGUSON is heard calling to him from the top of the stairs]

SARAH FERGUSON Andrew! Andrew! Are you there? *[She comes down part of the staircase and looks over the banisters]* Are you there, Andrew? Clutie! *[She comes into the kitchen and looks about her]* Clutie! *[She goes to the foot of the stairs and calls up to HANNAH]* It's all right, Hannah, dear! Andrew's away to fetch your da!

[She goes to the door and looks out for a few moments Then she closes the door and goes up the stairs again]

ACT III

It is early in the morning of the following day The room is bright and cheery because a fine sunshine pours in at the window and open door There is nothing in the appearance of the kitchen to indicate that any unusual thing has happened, the gun is again suspended over the fireplace MRS FERGUSON is bending over the fire, settling a kettle on the coals and turf, when her husband comes into the kitchen from the staircase

SARAH FERGUSON Is that you, John?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay *[He seats himself by the fire]* Where's Andrew?

SARAH FERGUSON He's away out to the byre Will I call him?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, do!

[MRS FERGUSON goes to the door and calls out "Andrew! Andrew!"

ANDREW is heard to shout, "What do you want, Ma?" and MRS FERGUSON replies, "Your da wants you a minute!" ANDREW shouts back, "I'll be in in a wee while" MRS FERGUSON returns to the fire]

SARAH FERGUSON He says he'll be in in a minute Did you get your rest, John?

JOHN FERGUSON I couldn't sleep at all, I lay still and closed my eyes, but my mind was working all the time I kept on wondering where Jimmy went to last night I suppose no one has come up the loane with news?

SARAH FERGUSON There's been no one next or near this place this morning

but ourselves and Clutie John I gave him his breakfast and sent him packing He was in a quare wild mood, that lad, and could hardly contain himself for excitement

JOHN FERGUSON I darsay he was greatly disturbed in his mind after what happened yesterday Them people is quare and easily excited I wish Andrew would come! Is Hannah up yet?

SARAH FERGUSON Indeed I don't know I didn't call her this morning She was a long while getting her sleep, and so I just let her be on She'll be all the better for the rest

JOHN FERGUSON Ay I can't make out where Jimmy went to last night I thought mebbe he'd go straight to Witherow from here, and so I went there first, but I didn't see him

SARAH FERGUSON Did you see Witherow?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay I warned him about Jimmy

SARAH FERGUSON You warned him?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay

SARAH FERGUSON And you never laid a finger on him?

JOHN FERGUSON No

SARAH FERGUSON Well, indeed, I can't make you out, John! There's a man's harmed your daughter, and you didn't as much as lift your hand to him! You went and warned him about Jimmy! Oh, John, I can't understand you! It doesn't seem right someway to be acting like that!

JOHN FERGUSON God's Word says I must love my enemies, Sarah That is my guide in all I do It's hard to obey that commandment, and when I was standing there in front of Witherow, I was tempted to take a ho'd of him and do him an injury but I resisted the temptation, and I did what God bid me I wasn't able to love him, but I warned him I could do no more than that but God'll mebbe understand!

SARAH FERGUSON *[sighing]* Ah, well! It's a quare way to look at things If any one was to hurt me, I'd do my best to hurt them back, and hurt them harder nor they hurt me That would learn them!

JOHN FERGUSON Would it? Men's been hitting back since the beginning of the world, but hitting back has learned no one anything but hatred and bitterness

SARAH FERGUSON What did you do after you saw Witherow?

JOHN FERGUSON I went down to Jimmy's shop, but he wasn't there I dundhered on the door, but I could get no answer Matt Kerr put his head out of his

window, but he couldn't tell me a thing about Jimmy I didn't know what to do after that! I wandered about in the dark for a while, and then I went back to the shop, but he still wasn't there! I was feeling tired, and I sat down for a wee while, thinking mebbe Jimmy would turn up while I was waiting, but he didn't, and so I came home

SARAH FERGUSON You might have got your death of cold sitting there in the damp It's a wonder to me you never knocked against Andrew!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, it is, but sure it's easy to miss people when it isn't light
[ANDREW FERGUSON enters by the door *There is a somber look on his face It is not the darkness of a man who is horrified by his own deed, but the darkness of a man who has set himself willingly to do some desperate work that must be done*]

ANDREW FERGUSON You were wanting me, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, Andrew! [*Regarding his son closely*] You're looking tired, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON I am tired, but sure we all are Da, you ought not to have got up this morning You're not strong, and you must nearly be worn out

JOHN FERGUSON I couldn't rest, son Andrew, I want you to go and inquire about Jimmy Caesar I'll not be easy in my mind till I see him safe and sound I feel my own responsibility, son I'll admit to you I was hoping Hannah'd marry him, and I didn't discourage her from saying "yes" to him when he asked her, for all I knew she was only doing it for the farm I knew the girl couldn't bear him, but I pretended to myself it would all come right in the end I love this house, Andrew! That's the excuse I have for not being honest with Hannah

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, sure, you left it to her own free will

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, I tried to salve my conscience that way, but I said it in a way that showed plain what my desire was If I had been firm, there would have been none of this bother now You understand me, son, don't you? I feel I won't be happy till I see Jimmy safe and sound from harm, because I put him in danger God knows what would happen if he was to meet Witherow in the temper he was in last night

ANDREW FERGUSON I daresay he's all right, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON I'd be glad if you'd

go all the same and search for him, Andrew

SARAH FERGUSON Just go to please him, Andrew His mind's upset about Jimmy, and there'll be no contenting him till he sees him

ANDREW FERGUSON It'll put the work on the farm behind, Da

JOHN FERGUSON That doesn't matter, son

ANDREW FERGUSON but I'll go to please you!

JOHN FERGUSON Thank you, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON There's no need for you to be uneasy about him, though You may be sure Jimmy's come to no harm We all know rightly the kind he is Mebbe he's lying snug in his bed this minute, moaning and groaning, and saying what he'd do to Witherow one of these days, but you know as well as you're living he'll never do it

JOHN FERGUSON I'd liefer he was a collic a thousand times over nor have him take a man's life

ANDREW FERGUSON Even after what Witherow's done?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son Witherow will have to make his answer to God, and God will deal justly with him We can't do that No one can do justice to a man that's done an injury to them We'd be thinking all the time of our trouble and wanting revenge We wouldn't be striving hard, the way God would, to understand everything

ANDREW FERGUSON There's no need to be striving to understand everything, Da It's a plain matter that a child can understand The man done wrong, and he has a right to suffer for it

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son, he'll suffer for it, but that's the work of his Maker, and not the work of Jimmy Caesar or you or me or any man You're wrong, Andrew, when you say there's nothing to understand There's everything to understand There's the man himself to understand Do you think that Jimmy Caesar can judge Henry Witherow when he doesn't know him as God knows him?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*impatiently*] I've no time or patience for that kind of talk If Jimmy Caesar killed him he was right to kill him only I don't suppose he did

JOHN FERGUSON Don't you see now, Andrew, that you're not fit to judge Henry Witherow either? You can't judge a man if you have anger in your heart against

him You must love him before you can do justly by him

ANDREW FERGUSON Och, quit, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON And that's what God does, Andrew! God's something that sees inside you and knows every bit of you and never has no spite against you Do you understand me, son? He judges you, but He doesn't punish you He just gives knowledge to you so that you see yourself as He sees you, and that's your punishment, Andrew, if you've done wrong It's knowing yourself as God knows you that hurts you harder nor anything else in the world Do you think Henry Witherow'll be happy when he sees himself with God's eyes? I wouldn't be that man on the last day for the wealth of the world! I'm all moidhered, Andrew, and I'm a poor hand at saying what's in my mind, but I know well that if Henry Witherow wronged me a thousand times more nor he has, I'd be doing God's will if I knelt down and kissed his feet

ANDREW FERGUSON I don't understand that kind of religion

SARAH FERGUSON Here's some one coming up the loane I can hear their steps [*She goes to the door as she speaks*] It's Jimmy!

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy Caesar?

SARAH FERGUSON Ay

JOHN FERGUSON Oh, thank God, thank God, he's come at last!

[*JAMES CAESAR enters The look of assurance has completely gone, and so, too, has some of the meanness He has the look of a man who has suffered great shame and humiliation, and although he feels mean, he does not look so mean as he did at the beginning of the play*]

SARAH FERGUSON Come in, Jimmy, come in! Sure, we're all right and glad to see you again!

JOHN FERGUSON [*going to him and wringing his hand*] Ay, Jimmy, we are, indeed I'm glad this minute to see you safe from harm Sit down, man! [*He leads CAESAR to a chair, and CAESAR sits down*] You must be worn out [*JAMES CAESAR glances about the room for a moment Then he bows his head on the table and begins to cry hysterically*] Ay, man, you'll want to cry after the trouble you've had

ANDREW FERGUSON [*contemptuously*] My God, what a man!

JOHN FERGUSON It's the reaction, son, that's what it is He can't help himself Nobody could

SARAH FERGUSON A drink of tea'll do him a world of good The kettle's on, and I'll have the tea wet in no time at all [*She goes to CAESAR and pats him on the back*] There, there, Jimmy, keep your heart up! Sure, we all know the troubles you've had to bear Just put a good face on it, and you'll be as happy as you like

JAMES CAESAR I'm a disgraced man!

JOHN FERGUSON No, no, no, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [*raising his head*] Ay, I am, John I'm a disgraced man! I heard what Andrew said to you a minute ago, and he was right "My God," he said, "what a man!"

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, sure, Andrew didn't mean it, Jimmy Don't be paying no heed to him

ANDREW FERGUSON [*angrily*] I did mean it

JOHN FERGUSON That's poor comfort, Andrew, to be offering to a broken man I'd be ashamed to say that to any one

JAMES CAESAR [*as if eager to make little of himself*] But it's true, John, for all that I've failed another time

JOHN FERGUSON It was God that checked you, Jimmy

JAMES CAESAR I went out of this house last night with my mind set on killing Witherow If I'd met him in the loane I'd 'a' throttled him there and then

JOHN FERGUSON I'm thankful you didn't meet him!

JAMES CAESAR [*rambling on*]

I was near demented with rage, and I hardly knew what I was doing I started off for his farm I could see the light in his front room shining down the glen, and it drew me towards it I was that mad I didn't care what I done I scrambled through the hedges and tore my hands and face with the thorns Look at the cuts on my hands!

[*He holds out his hands for inspection*]

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, ay

JAMES CAESAR But I didn't care what happened to me I felt nothing but the desire to get Witherow dead I went across the fields, tumbling over stooks of corn, and slipping in puddles and drains till I come near the farm, and then I remembered I had nothing to kill him with

ANDREW FERGUSON [*sneering*] Ha!

JAMES CAESAR [*turning to ANDREW*] I'm no match for him, Andrew, and if I'd gone into the house then, he'd have thrown me into the yard before I could have lifted a finger to him [*Insist-*

ing on his weakness] I haven't the strength, Andrew, and I've a poor spirit. It wouldn't have been a fair fight if I'd gone in then and me with no weapon, would it, Andrew? Would it, John? I hadn't even a sally rod in my hands.

SARAH FERGUSON He's stronger nor you by a good piece, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR Yes, Mrs. Ferguson! That's what I said to myself I said, "I'll have no chance against him if I go without a weapon!" That's what I said to myself I made up my mind I'd go back to the shop to get my gun, and then I'd come back again to the farm and I'd shoot him dead.

JOHN FERGUSON Aw, horrible, horrible.

ANDREW FERGUSON And why didn't you go back again?

JAMES CAESAR [*miserably*] You've guessed right, Andrew. I never went near the place again. I got to the shop and I went in quietly and got my gun, and then I come out again. I had hardly got across the doorstep when I began to feel afraid, and I could feel the gun shaking in my hands as I gripped it. I went a bit of the way along the road, and I kept thinking some one was watching me, and then all of a sudden I started to run, and I run and I run till I come to the planting. I went in among the trees, and before I knew where I was I tripped over something on the ground and the gun went off in my hands. I was scared of my life for fear any one would hear it, and I got up and left the gun on the ground, and I run on through the trees like a wild thing till I could run no more. Then I crawled in under a whin-bush and I hid there till this morning. I lay there cursing myself for a collic, and trying to stir myself up to go and kill him in the daylight, but I couldn't do it. I kept on making excuses. That's the sort of me, John! I'm always imagining myself doing grand things, and seeing people clapping me and making speeches about me, and printing things in the papers because of my greatness and my gallantry, but if a cow was to make a run at me in the fields, I'd be near scared to death of it. It's bad enough, Andrew, to know that other people are ashamed of you, but it's hell to be ashamed of yourself, the way I am this minute, and it's hell to have dreams of yourself doing big things, and you knowing rightly you'll never have the pluck to do a wee thing, let alone a big one.

JOHN FERGUSON There's many a

thing that a lad like Andrew might think was big, but it's quare and small.

JAMES CAESAR It's kind of you to talk the way you do, John, but it's poor comfort to a man that knows he's as poor-spirited as myself. If Hannah was married on me now, I feel I would leave her in the lurch if she needed my help any time. That's the way of me, and I knew it well last night when I was hiding under the whin-bush. I'm not like you, John Ferguson, that has no hatred in your heart, and can forgive a man that does an injury to you. I'm full of hate, and I want to hurt them that hurts me, but I haven't the courage to do it.

ANDREW FERGUSON Well, there's no use in sitting here talking about it.

JAMES CAESAR No, Andrew, there isn't. I come here this morning to excuse myself to Hannah and all of you. I thought that was the least I could do.

JOHN FERGUSON No, no, Jimmy, no, no! I'm right and glad you didn't harm Witherow. I'd have been sore-hearted if you had.

SARAH FERGUSON He went out to search for you last night, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR Who? John?

SARAH FERGUSON Ay.

ANDREW FERGUSON He searched the place for you. A sick man went out to try and prevent a strong, able-bodied man from doing what he ought to have done, and while the sick man was wearing himself out with the search, the strong man was hiding underneath a whin-bush in mortal fear of his life!

[*ANDREW'S voice grows in anger and contempt as he speaks*]

JAMES CAESAR [*miserably*] Oh, my God, my God!

JOHN FERGUSON Wheesht, Andrew, wheesht! Jimmy, man, it's not like the thing for you to give way in that fashion! Control yourself, man! I'm as happy this minute as ever I've been in my life because I know God's saved you from sinning your soul with a murder. I'm proud to think you wouldn't kill Witherow.

JAMES CAESAR [*in a misery of self-abasement*] But I'm not saved from sin, John. I didn't leave Witherow alone because I didn't want to kill him. I did want to kill him. I left him alone because I was afraid to touch him. My mind's the same now as it was when I went out of this house last night with murder in my heart. I want Witherow to be dead. I'd be glad this minute if some one came in the door

there and told me he was dead But I'd be afraid to lay a finger on him myself That's the cowardliest thing of all, to want to commit a sin and not have the courage to do it Do you think God'll be gratified when he thinks I didn't kill Witherow because I was too big a collie to do it?

SARAH FERGUSON Well, quit talking about it, anyway Make yourself content while I get you a bite to eat

JAMES CAESAR I couldn't taste it It'd choke me

SARAH FERGUSON Now, a drop of tea never choked no one The kettle's boiling, and it'll not take me a minute to make a cup of good warm tea for you You must be perished with the cold, and you lying out on the damp grass all night Just content yourself while I spread the table

[*She sets about preparing the meal*]

JAMES CAESAR [*in whom confession has now grown to something like a craving*] I know rightly you have contempt for me, Andrew [*ANDREW stands at the window with his back to the others He does not answer*] I know you have Anybody would [*To JOHN FERGUSON*] Hannah'll have the quare contempt for me, too There'll be plenty will, and they'll be pointing at me and making remarks about me It'll be quare and hard for me to hold up my head again after this It will, in sang [*His voice changes its note slightly as he begins to speculate on his conduct*] You know, it's quare the way things turn out! Yesterday, after Hannah said she'd have me, I was having the great notions of myself and her I imagined myself prospering greatly, and Andrew here doing well in the branch I was going to open at Ballymaclurg, and then I thought to myself I'd mebbe get made a magistrate

ANDREW FERGUSON [*scornfully*] Ha! Ha, ha!

JAMES CAESAR Well, Andrew, there's many that's not so well reared as myself that are made magistrates this day, and can send fellows like Clutie John to jail for a month and more for being without visible means of subsistence

ANDREW FERGUSON Ay, indeed, that sort of a job would suit you rightly! You could be doing an injury to other people without running any risk yourself! By my sang, Jimmy, you ought to be a magistrate! Mebbe, if you were one now, you'd fine Witherow forty shillings for what he done to Hannah! [*In great fury*] Ah, you make me feel sick! I'll go out in

the air a while and be quit of you I'm near stifled in here!

[*He goes out violently*]

JAMES CAESAR There you are, John! That's the kind of contempt I'll have to thole from people after this Hannah's tongue is bitterer nor Andrew's and she'll be harder to bear nor him

SARAH FERGUSON [*completing the arrangements for the meal*] Well, indeed, it's easy enough to bear the weight of a person's tongue You'll come to small harm, Jimmy Caesar, if that's all the trouble you have Sit up, now, and take your breakfast!

JAMES CAESAR [*drawing his chair closer to the table*] It's kind and thoughtful of you, Mrs Ferguson, but I've no appetite at all

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, wheesht with you!

JAMES CAESAR I'll only take the tea

[*He begins to eat his breakfast*]

SARAH FERGUSON Draw up, John, to the table! I wonder ought I to call Andrew in or let him have his after a wee while

JOHN FERGUSON [*coming to the table*] Leave him for the present His mind's disturbed

SARAH FERGUSON Very well [*She goes to the foot of the stairs*] Hannah! [*She pauses, and then calls again*] Hannah!

JAMES CAESAR You're not bringing her down, are you?

SARAH FERGUSON She has to have her food the same as yourself [*She calls again*] Are you up yet, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*upstairs*] Ay, Ma

SARAH FERGUSON Well, come down and have your breakfast

[*She returns to the table and sits down*]

JOHN FERGUSON Mebbe she'd better have hers upstairs

SARAH FERGUSON No, indeed, she won't have it upstairs There's no good of her sitting up there crying her eyes out The world has to go on just the same as ever, no matter what happens What'll you have, Jimmy? A piece of soda or a piece of wheaten farl? I baked the soda yesterday

JAMES CAESAR Ah, I couldn't touch it

SARAH FERGUSON [*putting bread on his plate*] Well, just take it on your plate anyway, and if you have a fancy for it after a while it'll be convenient to you John, what'll you have? [*HANNAH descends the stairs*] Ah is that you at last,

Hannah? Come on in here and have you breakfast! Do you see Jimmy Caesar?

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, Ma Good morning, Jimmy!

[*She sits down beside her father*]

JAMES CAESAR Good morning to you, Hannah

JOHN FERGUSON [*kissing HANNAH affectionately*] How're you, daughter?

JAMES CAESAR Hannah, I've come here this morning to make a confession to you!

SARAH FERGUSON Well, eat your breakfast first

JAMES CAESAR I must tell her, Mrs Ferguson, before I take another bite Hannah, I went out last night to kill Henry Witherow, but when I was getting ready to kill him, I got afeard and I run away and hid myself I come here this morning to tell you the poor sort of man I am I daresay you're thankful you broke your word to me, for I'm not much of a support to any woman

HANNAH FERGUSON I don't want you to make no confession to me

JAMES CAESAR Ah, but I must Sure, I must tell people the way I feel That's the only thing that's left to me now Hannah, will you forgive me for not killing Witherow?

HANNAH FERGUSON I didn't ask you to kill him I had no call to ask you

JAMES CAESAR [*on whom the mean manner has gradually been gaining control*]

If you're not angry with me, Hannah, then I'm glad I didn't do an injury to him If I had killed him, mebbe it would have done no good! I daresay your da's right! Sure, if I'd done anything to Witherow I'd 'a' been put in jail, and my business that I've built up this long would 'a' been sold on me and mebbe I'd be hanged, and there'd be no good in that at all I wonder now is it not better to forget and forgive! Of course, if a man does wrong he ought to be made to suffer for it That's only right, and if Witherow was brought before the magistrates

[*HANNAH gets up suddenly in distress*]

HANNAH FERGUSON Oh, quit talking about it, quit talking!

[*She goes to the sofa and throws herself prone on it*]

SARAH FERGUSON [*going to her*] There, there, Hannah, don't be upsetting yourself!

[*She comforts HANNAH*]

JAMES CAESAR That's the way of me again, John! I'm always raking things up! I wish now I had killed Witherow There'd

be some satisfaction in that! Do you think Hannah'd marry me if I was to ask her again? I'd be willing to marry her just the same! [*He turns to HANNAH*] Hi, Hannah, do you hear that? I'm willing to marry you just the same if you'll have me! Will you?

[*HANNAH, still sobbing, does not reply*]

SARAH FERGUSON Hannah, dear, do you not hear Jimmy speaking to you?

JAMES CAESAR [*getting up and going to HANNAH*] Listen, Hannah! I was thinking as I was coming along that mebbe you'd have a poor opinion of me when you heard the way I'd behaved, but mebbe after all things has turned out for the best, and if you'll marry me I daresay we'll be as happy as any one [*To MRS FERGUSON*] Dear bless us, Mrs Ferguson, it's quare the way my mind alters every wee minute or so! I think one time I ought to have killed Witherow, and then I think another time I was right not to kill him, and one minute I'm ashamed of myself and another minute I'm near satisfied [*To HANNAH*] Are you listening to me, Hannah?

JOHN FERGUSON Don't trouble her now, Jimmy! Come and finish your breakfast

JAMES CAESAR Well, we can discuss it later [*He returns to the table and begins his meal again*] When I come in here this morning I felt as if I could never put another bite of food in my mouth, and now I'm eating my breakfast as easy as anything How would you account for the like of that, John?

JOHN FERGUSON I can account for nothing, Jimmy, outside God's will

JAMES CAESAR [*unctuously*] Ah, that's true "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform"

[*CLUTIE JOHN enters in a state of great excitement*]

CLUTIE JOHN Mr Ferguson! Mr Ferguson!

SARAH FERGUSON [*starting up in alarm*] Ah, Clutie John, go 'long with you! You near startled me out of my wits! What do you want to come running in like that for? Go 'long with you, man! We don't want you here the day again!

CLUTIE JOHN [*tensely*] I must tell you, I must tell you! Mr Ferguson! [*He sees JAMES CAESAR*] Oh, there's Mr Caesar!

JAMES CAESAR Have you never seen me before, you great gumph you, that

you're standing there gaping at me like that?

JOHN FERGUSON What is it, Clutie? [To JAMES CAESAR] Don't be harsh with him, Jimmy! He's greatly upset after what happened yesterday

JAMES CAESAR All right!

[He goes on with his meal]

CLUTIE JOHN I've fearful news for you, Mr Ferguson! It's quare Mr Caesar should be here!

JAMES CAESAR What's quare about it?

CLUTIE JOHN [looking at him in an odd manner] Didn't you kill Mr Witherow?

JAMES CAESAR [rising in a fury] Quit out of the place, damn you

CLUTIE JOHN [shaking from CAESAR and running to JOHN FERGUSON] Don't let him strike me, Mr Ferguson! I'm afeard of my life of him!

JOHN FERGUSON [quieting him] He'll not harm you, Clutie Sit down somewhere and control yourself! And don't be talking about killing anybody!

CLUTIE JOHN But he's dead, Mr Ferguson!

JOHN FERGUSON Dead!

SARAH FERGUSON Who's dead?

CLUTIE JOHN Henry Witherow!

JOHN FERGUSON My God!

CLUTIE JOHN He was found this morning in the farmyard shot through the heart

JOHN FERGUSON Shot!

CLUTIE JOHN Ay, shot he was! The peelers is up at the farm now Sergeant Kernaghan and two constables is there

SARAH FERGUSON Aw, it's not true, it's not true! The poor creature's demented and doesn't know what he's saying!

HANNAH FERGUSON Clutie, are you sure?

CLUTIE JOHN Ay, Hannah, I am Certain sure! [To MRS FERGUSON] It is true It is indeed, and 'deed and doubles! I wouldn't tell you a lie for the world I saw his corpse myself, stretched out in the yard It was quare to think of him lying there, and me could hit him if I lked and him couldn't hit back!

JAMES CAESAR But but who killed him? [JOHN FERGUSON turns to look at him, and JAMES CAESAR sees accusation in his eyes] I didn't do it, John! It wasn't me that killed him! I swear to God it wasn't me! I'll take my oath on the Bible!

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR I tell you I didn't do

it How do you know he's dead? You only have Clutie John's word for it, and you know rightly he's away in the mind!

HANNAH FERGUSON Oh, he's dead, thank God, he's dead!

JAMES CAESAR [turning to her] It's mebbe not true, Hannah

CLUTIE JOHN It's as true as death, Hannah! I tell you I saw him myself, and the peelers were asking a wheen of questions

JAMES CAESAR [in a panic] Did they ask anything about me, Clutie? [He does not wait for an answer, but, sitting down at the table, buries his face in his hands] Oh, my God, they'll be blaming me for it, and I never did it at all! [He gets up and goes to JOHN FERGUSON, plucking his arm] John, listen to me! You know the sort I am, don't you? You know rightly I couldn't have done it myself! I came here this morning and told you I was afeard to do it! Oh, my God, won't you believe me?

HANNAH FERGUSON Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [miserably] Ay, Hannah

HANNAH FERGUSON Don't deny it if you did it

JAMES CAESAR I wouldn't deny it! [He goes to HANNAH] Hannah, make your da believe me! Tell him you don't think I did it You don't, do you?

HANNAH FERGUSON You say you didn't, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR But you think I did do it! I know you do! I can see it in your eyes!

HANNAH FERGUSON I'd be proud if you had done it, Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR [miserably] Every one'll think I did it, the peelers and every one!

[He subsides again at the table]

CLUTIE JOHN It's a fearful thing to take a man's life It is, in sang! There was many a song made up in Ireland about the like of a thing of that sort I wonder, now, could I make up a song about Henry Witherow to be singing on the fair-days!

SARAH FERGUSON Wheesht with you, Clutie!

JAMES CAESAR [starting up and addressing CLUTIE JOHN] What sort of questions were the peelers asking, Clutie? Did they make any mention of me, did you hear?

CLUTIE JOHN I couldn't hear a word they were saying, Mr Caesar, but whatever questions they were asking, they were putting the answers down in their wee books

JAMES CAESAR If they get to know I had a grudge against Witherow over the head of Hannah, they'll be after me. They know rightly I never cared for him any time of my life, but then I never done any harm to him for all my talk, and if they didn't know about Hannah, mebbe they'd never think of me [*Going to JOHN FERGUSON*] John, you'll never let on anything, will you? [*He turns, without waiting for an answer, and speaks to MRS FERGUSON and HANNAH*] You two won't either, will you? And Clutie John? I'm sorry, Clutie, for all I said to you I wasn't thinking, that's why I said it. And if you'll not let on to the peelers about me, I'll give you something for yourself.

CLUTIE JOHN What'll you give me, Mr Caesar?

JAMES CAESAR I don't know yet I'll give you something. I'll give you your dinner whenever you want it, and I'll let you sleep in my loft [*To JOHN FERGUSON*] John, make him promise not to clash on me! You have more influence over him nor any one. Where's Andrew? We must make him promise too! Call him in, Mrs Ferguson, and bid him promise he won't tell!

JOHN FERGUSON We can't make any promises, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR You'll not promise! Oh, you'll never go and tell the peelers, will you, and have them suspecting me, and me didn't do it?

JOHN FERGUSON You must answer to the law, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR But I didn't do it, I tell you! I'll take my oath I didn't. Where's the Bible? I'll swear on the Bible!

[*ANDREW FERGUSON enters from the door*]

ANDREW FERGUSON What ails you all?

JOHN FERGUSON Henry Witherow's dead!

[*ANDREW pauses for a few moments before he replies. When he speaks his voice is very strained*]

ANDREW FERGUSON Oh!

JOHN FERGUSON He was found in his yard this morning, shot!

ANDREW FERGUSON Shot!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay!

ANDREW FERGUSON That's square!

JAMES CAESAR [*wildly*] Your da thinks it was me that shot him, Andrew, and so does your ma and Hannah, but I

tell you I didn't. You know me, Andrew, don't you? You guessed that I wouldn't have the courage to kill Witherow, didn't you?

ANDREW FERGUSON [*turning away from him*] Ay.

JAMES CAESAR There, you hear what your son says, John Ferguson! You hear him, don't you? Andrew doesn't believe I did it. I feel happier in my mind now. Mebbe the peelers'll believe me when I tell them I didn't do it. Sergeant Kernaghan knows me well. Him and me was at the same school together.

ANDREW FERGUSON You ought to try and get away, Jimmy.

JAMES CAESAR Get away! Do you not believe me either, Andrew? Do you think I killed him?

ANDREW FERGUSON No, I don't believe you did, but it's likely other people'll think it.

JOHN FERGUSON Jimmy, why don't you ease your mind? There's no boundary to the love of God, and if you confess your sin, He'll forgive you for it.

JAMES CAESAR Will I never satisfy you, John? Will you never believe I didn't do it?

JOHN FERGUSON I wish I could believe you.

ANDREW FERGUSON If you can prove where you were.

JAMES CAESAR How can I prove it when no one seen me?

[*CLUTIE JOHN goes to the door and looks down the loane*]

CLUTIE JOHN Here's the peelers coming!

JAMES CAESAR [*in terror*] Oh, my God!

CLUTIE JOHN There's the sergeant and the constables and a crowd of people running after them!

JAMES CAESAR They're coming for me! I know rightly they are! They'll take me up. John, for the love of God, help me to hide somewhere!

JOHN FERGUSON I can't, Jimmy, I can't. If you've broke the law, the law must have its reckoning.

ANDREW FERGUSON Have you changed your mind, then, Da! You were all for love and forgiveness awhile ago.

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son, I was, and I am still, but Jimmy must redeem himself. A man should submit to punishment of his own free will, not be dragged to it. I know I'm not thinking clear, but I'm certain that Jimmy should submit to the

law, whether he killed Witherow or not
It'll tell again' him if he runs away

[*The noise of the approaching crowd is heard*]

JAMES CAESAR I must hide, I must
hide! I can't face them! [*He gazes wildly
round the room*] Hannah, tell your da to
let me hide!

JOHN FERGUSON There's no use in
hiding, Jimmy You can't hide from your-
self, can you?

JAMES CAESAR Hide me, Hannah,
and God'll reward you!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*appealingly*]
Da!

JOHN FERGUSON I can't, daughter
He must submit himself to the will of
God There's no other way for a man to
save himself

[*The crowd comes to the door SER-
GEANT KERNAGHAN and the two
constables step inside the kitchen The
Sergeant advances while the constables
keep back the murmuring crowd
which surges round the door*]

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN I'm sorry
to put you to any bother [*He sees JAMES
CAESAR*] Ah, James Caesar, I arrest you
on the suspicion of murdering Henry
Witherow, and I warn you that anything
you say will be taken down in writing and
used as evidence against you!

JAMES CAESAR [*shrinking*] I didn't
do it! I tell you I didn't do it! Sergeant,
for the love of God don't take me up! You
and me attended the same school to-
gether

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN I'm heart-
sore at having to do it, Jimmy, but I can't
help myself

[*He beckons to the constables, who come
forward and put handcuffs on CAE-
SAR'S wrists The crowd penetrates
into the room, and the Sergeant goes
and pushes it back*]

JAMES CAESAR [*more calmly*] I
meant to kill him I admit that [*The
crowd tosses this admission from lip to
lip*] But I didn't do it If I should never
speak again, that's the God's truth! I'm
not sorry he's dead, but it wasn't me that
killed him

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN Come
along, now

JAMES CAESAR Good-bye to you
all!

JOHN FERGUSON God give you
peace, Jimmy!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*going to CAE-
SAR and touching his arm*] Good-bye,
Jimmy!

JAMES CAESAR I wish for your sake
I had killed him, I'd be a happier man
nor I am

SERGEANT KERNAGHAN I must ask
you to come along now [*To the consta-
bles*] Just clear the crowd away from the
door!

[*The constables push the people away
from the door, and then they and the
Sergeant close about JIMMY CAE-
SAR and take him away The crowd
surges round them and slowly disap-
pears, murmuring loudly as it goes
HANNAH closes the door behind them
and then goes and sits down on the
sofa beside her mother, who is weep-
ing There is silence for a moment*]

JOHN FERGUSON God knows His
own ways best!

[*ANDREW stands staring in front of
him Then he goes to the door and
opens it, and stands gazing down the
loamie after the retreating crowd
CLUTIE JOHN sits down on the seat
in the fireplace and takes out his whis-
tle He begins to play "Willie Reilly
and His Colleen Bawn"*]

ANDREW FERGUSON [*fiercely*] Quit
that damned whistle, will you?

[*CLUTIE JOHN looks up at him ques-
tioningly, and then puts the whistle
away ANDREW stands still for a mo-
ment longer Then he closes the door
and walks towards the fire and holds
his hands in front of the blaze*]

ANDREW FERGUSON It's colder the
day nor it was yesterday!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son!

ACT IV

*It is the late afternoon of a day a fort-
night later JOHN FERGUSON, who
has become feebler in the interval, but
at the same time more deeply religious,
is sitting in the attitude in which he
was seen at the beginning of the play
His chair is drawn up to the fire, and
he has his Bible open in his hands He
is reading the eighteenth chapter of
the second book of Samuel It is clear
from his look of fragility that he is
dying MRS FERGUSON is standing
at the door, looking down the loamie*

JOHN FERGUSON [*reading aloud*]
"And the king said, Is the young man
Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered,
When Joab sent the king's servant, and me
thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I

knew not what it was And the king said unto him, Turn aside and stand there, And he turned aside and stood still And, behold, Cushî came, and Cushî said, Tidings, my lord, the king for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee And the king said unto Cushî, Is the young man Absalom safe? "

SARAH FERGUSON Here's Hannah, now, John! She's just turned the corner of the loanie

JOHN FERGUSON [*looking up from his Bible*] Ay, wife, it'll be about her time

SARAH FERGUSON [*entering the kitchen and setting a kettle on the fire*] I don't know how she can bear to go and see Jimmy the way she does when she minds everything If it hadn't been for her changing her mind, Witherow would be lving now!

JOHN FERGUSON [*putting the Bible down on the table beside him, and turning to his wife*] You must never say the like of that to her, Sarah! The girl couldn't see in front of her No one could

SARAH FERGUSON She would have nothing to do with him before he killed Witherow, and now she goes to see him whenever they'll let her in the jail! You would near think she was in love with him over the head of the crime, though I don't believe she is myself for all she visits him [*She sits down on the sofa and takes up some darning on which she begins to work*] There's been a quare change in her this last fortnight! She's quieter on it, and not so headstrong and set on herself as she used to be Indeed, sometimes I near think she's in a decline

JOHN FERGUSON [*sighing as he speaks*] Ay, she's been through a mort of sorrow, that gurl! She's young to be feeling the weight of the world already

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, indeed! And there's Andrew hasn't a word to say to any one since it happened Sometimes I try to talk to him about Jimmy, but sure I might as well hold my tongue All I can get out of him is "Ay, Ma!" or "No," or mebbe he'll just nod his head [*She sighs*] Ah, dear, our children seem to be slipping away from us, John!

JOHN FERGUSON Mebbe they're going past us, Sarah It's natural, that! You and your children can't keep pace with each other all your life They must get ahead of you some time It hurts you when you feel them outstripping you, but it's the way God works, and sure He doesn't leave you without a consolation

of some sort God never hits you with both hands at the one time, Sarah, and if we're losing our children, we're finding ourselves You and me's drawing closer to one another, woman!

[*He holds out his hand to her*]

SARAH FERGUSON [*taking his hand*] Ay, John, we are We were always good comrades since ever we were married, you and me, for all the trouble we've had

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, wife, ay!

[*He takes up the Bible again and reads it to himself As he does so, HANNAH enters the kitchen Her manner is more restrained than it was when the play began, and she seems to be older in manner Her actions appear to be independent of her thoughts*]

SARAH FERGUSON You're back again, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, Ma!

[*She takes off her outdoor garments and lays them aside*]

JOHN FERGUSON Well, Hannah, how is Jimmy the day?

HANNAH FERGUSON He seemed quieter in his mind, Da

JOHN FERGUSON Has he confessed the truth yet?

HANNAH FERGUSON No I didn't like to mention it to him, and he didn't say anything to me But I know he hasn't confessed, because I went to Mulhern, the solicitor, afterwards, and he told me Jimmy still makes out that he didn't do it

[*She comes and sits at the table, facing the audience*]

JOHN FERGUSON I wish he'd unburden his mind It's no good keeping it up like that What does Mulhern say about it?

HANNAH FERGUSON He doesn't know what to think He says that when he's by himself he feels sure Jimmy did it, but when he's with Jimmy he begins to be doubtful

JOHN FERGUSON Doubtful

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay There's something about the way Jimmy denies it that near makes you believe him All the same, Mulhern thinks he did it, and he says that if he was to confess, it would be better for him There are extenuating circumstances

JOHN FERGUSON Nothing can extenuate a murder, Hannah! God's Word is clear "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that spitefully use you And unto him that smiteth thee on the one

cheek, offer also the other, and him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid him not to take thy coat also" Them words is plain enough You can't twist them out of their meaning There can be no excuse, Hannah, for a bad deed there can only be repentance and forgiveness

HANNAH FERGUSON We all have our natures, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, daughter, we have, but there's the one duty for the whole of us

HANNAH FERGUSON I met John Comber on the road, and he's set on getting up a petition for Jimmy He says the judge is sure to sentence him to death

SARAH FERGUSON God save us!

HANNAH FERGUSON and so we'd better be prepared to do all that's needful

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, sure, they'll never hang him when they know all the facts It wouldn't be honest or fair, and there's many says Witherow should have been shot long ago They'll mebbe give Jimmy penal servitude for life

HANNAH FERGUSON That's worse nor hanging They take your life, but they don't give you death

SARAH FERGUSON [*sighing*] Ah, I daresay you're right! Dear knows, when you think of what they do to you, you'd wonder anybody ever killed a person at all

[*SAM MAWHINNEY, the postman, comes to the door*]

SAM MAWHINNEY I'm not empty-handed this time, Mrs Ferguson I've a letter for you the day

SARAH FERGUSON A letter?

SAM MAWHINNEY Ay, from America The mail's in the day!

SARAH FERGUSON [*going to him and taking the letter from him*] A letter from America!

SAM MAWHINNEY Ay! Don't you mind the last time the mail come in you were expecting a letter from America, and you were quare and cut up because you didn't get it? I declare to my goodness it was the very day Witherow was shot A fortnight the day! I never thought of that now!

SARAH FERGUSON [*absently*] Thank you, Sam!

SAM MAWHINNEY Ah, not at all I only hope it's good news for you Are you keeping your health, Mr Ferguson?

JOHN FERGUSON I'm bravely, thank you, Sam!

SAM MAWHINNEY That's right Good evening to you, Hannah! Well, I must be going Good night to you all!

SARAH FERGUSON Good night to you, Sam!

[*SAM MAWHINNEY goes off*]

SARAH FERGUSON [*standing in the center of the kitchen gazing vacantly at the letter*] It's from Andrew, John! Will I open it?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay!

[*She opens the envelope and takes out the letter and an order for money which are inside*]

SARAH FERGUSON Oh, he's sent the money to pay the mortgage!

[*She holds the order in her fingers and gazes stupidly at it for a few moments They are all silent for a while*]

HANNAH FERGUSON [*butterfly*] God's late, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON [*feeling the blow to his faith*] Don't, daughter, don't

HANNAH FERGUSON [*getting up and going to the window*] Oh, it's wicked, it's wicked!

SARAH FERGUSON If it had only come by the last mail!

JOHN FERGUSON There must be some meaning in it There must be! God doesn't make mistakes

SARAH FERGUSON Will I read the letter to you, John?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay! Ay, do!

SARAH FERGUSON [*sitting down at the table*] There's not much in it [*She peers at the letter*] I can't understand his writing without my specs!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*coming to her and taking the letter from her*] I'll read it, Ma! [*She, too, sits down at the table, and she reads the letter aloud*] "Dear Brother, I received your letter safe, and am sorry to hear about your trouble, but am glad to see that you are better in yourself and that Sarah and Andrew and Hannah are keeping their health as I am, too, thank God It is a great deal of money to send, and I have had a lot of bother to raise it, but I could not let the farm go out of the family without making an effort, so I send the money to you with this letter If I am well-spared I will mebbe come home and see you all I am getting tired of America It is no place for an old man that wasn't born here Remember me to all my friends and acquaintances, and with my best love and respect to all at home, I am, your affectionate brother, Andrew P S Write soon" [*She turns the letter*]

over] There's a piece on the other side
 "P S—I am sorry I missed the mail yesterday I made a mistake in the day, but I daresay this will reach you in time—Andrew"

[*She puts the letter down They sit in silence Then HANNAH begins to laugh hysterically*]

HANNAH FERGUSON Isn't it quare and funny, Da? Isn't it funny?

SARAH FERGUSON [*going to her and shaking her*] Hannah, Hannah, for dear sake, control yourself!

HANNAH FERGUSON [*lapsing from laughter to tears*] Where's the right in it, Da? Where's the right in it? It's not just! It's not fair!

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, qunt, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON There would have been none of this if he hadn't forgotten the right day, none of it Oh, Da, Da!

[*ANDREW FERGUSON enters*]

ANDREW FERGUSON Is anything the matter?

HANNAH FERGUSON No, no, Andrew! Nothing's the matter! Nothing! Your uncle Andrew forgot the mail-day, that's all!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*to his father*] What's up, Da?

JOHN FERGUSON [*jeebly*] It's it's your uncle

[*He becomes incoherent*]

SARAH FERGUSON Your uncle Andrew's sent the money to pay the mortgage, son He forgot the mail-day, and just missed it If he hadn't forgot, the money would have been here before, before Jimmy killed Witherow!

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay! Ay! Before—before Jimmy killed Witherow! And then my da says it was all planned!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*with a queer wrinkled smile on his face, as he takes up the letter and fingers it*] Huh! Uncle Andrew never had a good memory, had he? [*No one speaks*] Well, the farm's safe anyway

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, the farm's safe!

JOHN FERGUSON We can't understand everything It's no good trying to puzzle it all out We must just have faith that's all! Just have faith!

HANNAH FERGUSON One man's dead and another's in jail in danger of his life because my uncle Andrew forgot the mail-day

ANDREW FERGUSON It's it's a quare set-out!

JOHN FERGUSON Ay! [*Sighing heavily*] Ay!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*hysterically*] Ha! Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!

JOHN FERGUSON Andrew, Andrew, son, don't you give way, too! Set an example to your sister of self-control!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*recovering himself*] Ay! Ay, Da, I will

[*He sits down*]

SARAH FERGUSON Hannah's just come back from seeing Jimmy, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON Oh! Oh! Oh, yes, I remember, she was going to see him the day, wasn't she? [*His voice is very hard and strained*] What was he like, Hannah? [*HANNAH does not answer*]

SARAH FERGUSON She says he was quieter in his mind

ANDREW FERGUSON That's good It's good to be quiet in your mind! It's well for him

JOHN FERGUSON It's not well for him, Andrew He still denies that he killed Witherow

ANDREW FERGUSON Mebbe he didn't kill him, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON I would like to believe that, but I can't

ANDREW FERGUSON He ought to have killed him [*More emphatically*] He ought to have killed him but he didn't

JOHN FERGUSON Ah, son, what's the good of talking that way You and Hannah's overstrung, and you hardly know what you're saying or doing, the pair of you I've noticed how quiet you've been lately, and I believe you've been brooding over Jimmy till now you can't think clearly about him

ANDREW FERGUSON He didn't kill Witherow, Da He hadn't the pluck to kill him It was me that done it!

SARAH FERGUSON [*starting up*] You!

JOHN FERGUSON [*quietly*] Sit down Sarah! The lad's beside himself [*MRS FERGUSON resumes her seat*] Andrew, you must not give way to your fancies like that! [*He rises and faces him*] Come to bed, son, and rest yourself You look tired and exhausted

[*He takes hold of ANDREW'S arm and tries to lead him to the stairs*]

ANDREW FERGUSON [*eluding his father's grasp*] No, Da, I'm not away in the mind, as you think I know rightly

what I'm saying It was me that killed Witherow!

[Now that he has confessed his deed, his voice becomes quite calm.]

JOHN FERGUSON You're demented, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da, I'm not I killed him With that gun there

[He points to the gun over the mantel-shelf.]

SARAH FERGUSON *[in terrible alarm]* Son-a-dear, do you know what you're saying?

ANDREW FERGUSON I know rightly, Ma

SARAH FERGUSON It's not true, it's not true

[JOHN FERGUSON has been standing gaping at his son as if he cannot understand what he is saying Then, as comprehension comes to him, he goes to ANDREW and grips him by the shoulder.]

JOHN FERGUSON *[almost harshly]* Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON *[quietly]* Ay, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON Do you mean do you mean you killed Witherow?

ANDREW FERGUSON I do, Da!

JOHN FERGUSON *[releasing his grip and staggering back a little]* Oh, my God, my God!

SARAH FERGUSON It's not true, John, it's not true The poor lad's mind is turned with trouble

ANDREW FERGUSON It is true I knew that Jimmy wouldn't kill him, so I made up my mind I'd kill him myself

JOHN FERGUSON *[wildly]* Quit, quit, quit! I must think I must think!

[He goes back to his chair and sinks into it As he does so, his hand touches his Bible He pushes it away from him.]

HANNAH FERGUSON *[going to her brother and putting her arms about him]* Andrew, dear!

ANDREW FERGUSON I'm not sorry I killed him, Hannah!

HANNAH FERGUSON No, Andrew, I know you're not

ANDREW FERGUSON But I'm ashamed to think I let Jimmy bear the blame for it That's as bad as him hiding under the whin-bush when he should have been killing Witherow himself It's been on my mind ever since the peelers took him up That's the only thing that disturbs me I lie awake at night, and I say to myself, "You took Jimmy's place of your

own free will, but you made him take your place against his will!" Mind you, I fe't no more remorse when I killed Witherow nor a terrier feels when it kills a rat

HANNAH FERGUSON No, Andrew, why would you?

ANDREW FERGUSON I went up to his farm, and when I got there the dog begun to bark, and Witherow come to the door "Is that you, Jimmy Caesar?" he shouted "Have you come to kill me?" He let a big coarse laugh out of him when he said that, and I could feel my heart jumping mad inside me "It's not Jimmy Caesar!" I shouted back at him, "it's me!" I could see him straining to look at me, and his features was puzzled Then I put my gun up to my shoulder, and I took aim at him "Away home out of that!" he shouted And then I pulled the trigger, and he let a yell out of him and fell in a lump on the ground The dog was barking and straining at its chain

HANNAH FERGUSON Poor beast!

ANDREW FERGUSON But I didn't mind that I shouted at it to lie down, and then I come straight home I mind when I was half-way home, I said to myself, "Mebbe you've not killed him," and I was near turning back to make sure But I just didn't There was no one in the kitchen when I come in, and I put the gun back where I found it, and no one knew except me It never entered no one's mind that it was me killed him I was safe enough, and at first I didn't care whether Jimmy got hung or not I said to myself it would serve him right if he was hung for being a collier And then I tried to comfort myself by saying he wouldn't be hung at all when the people knew the way he'd been provoked But it wasn't any good I got more and more ashamed, and I couldn't sit still in the house with you all, and my da saying Jimmy ought to confess I couldn't rest nowhere The only consolation I had was to go into the fields and listen to Clutie playing his whistle He knew it was me done it, for all he didn't say anything

[JOHN FERGUSON rouses himself from the lethargy into which he sank when he heard his son's confession He gets up from his chair and takes hold of ANDREW as if he were protecting him from some danger.]

JOHN FERGUSON We must hide him somewhere That's what we must do We'll send you to America, Andrew, to live with your uncle Ay, ay! That's what the money was for! You may be certain sure that

was what it come for! You'll be safe when you're out of the country, son! No one'll harm you in America! *[To his wife]* Stir yourself, Sarah, woman, stir yourself! We've no time to lose The peelers might hear it and come any minute *[To ANDREW]* Come on, son, and get ready! You must quit the place the night

ANDREW FERGUSON No, Da

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son, you must! You can go up to Belfast by the next train, and we'll send the money to you there You'd better change your name, son! *[He puts his hands to his head as if he were dazed]* I'm all moidhered! Sarah, Sarah, woman!

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, John?

JOHN FERGUSON We must hide him the night Do you understand me? Mebbe some one heard him telling us about it You never know who's listening, and the world's full of clash-bags!

ANDREW FERGUSON I can't go, Da, and leave Jimmy in the wrong

JOHN FERGUSON Yes, yes, son! That'll be all right! We'll think about Jimmy afterwards Come and get ready now, son!

[He tries to lead ANDREW to the staircase, but ANDREW resists him]

SARAH FERGUSON Go with your da, son, and get ready!

ANDREW FERGUSON *[freeing himself from them and sitting down again]* I must do right by Jimmy for my peace's sake

JOHN FERGUSON No, son, you must save yourself first

ANDREW FERGUSON You're asking me to do what you wouldn't let Jimmy do for all he begged you!

JOHN FERGUSON *[fiercely]* You're my son, Andrew, and Jimmy's not! He always meant to kill Witherow Many's a time you all heard him say he would do it! Didn't you? You mocked him yourselves over the head of it He killed the man many's a while in his mind, and the Bible says if you think a sin you commit a sin *[He takes hold of ANDREW again]* Come away, son! Hannah, persuade him

HANNAH FERGUSON I can't, Da Andrew knows what's best for himself

SARAH FERGUSON Do you want your brother hanged, Hannah? Is that what you want?

HANNAH FERGUSON What peace will Andrew have if Jimmy suffers for him?

ANDREW FERGUSON That's what I

say to myself, many's a time, Hannah! You see that yourself, Da, don't you?

JOHN FERGUSON *[feebly going to his chair]* I've suffered enough! I've suffered enough, Andrew! It's not just or right to put more trouble on me now I've lost my health and then there was the mortgage and Hannah and Jimmy and now! Oh, I've bore enough, and it's not fair to ask me to bear any more

HANNAH FERGUSON We all have to make our own peace, Da We can't have it made for us You used always to say that

ANDREW FERGUSON Hannah's right, Da There'll be no content for me till I content myself *[He rises]* I'll go down now to the barracks and tell the sergeant

JOHN FERGUSON *[turning on him and speaking brokenly]* Son, Son!

SARAH FERGUSON I'll not have him made suffer! *[Going to ANDREW and holding him tightly]* I'll not let you go, Andrew, I'll not let you go!

ANDREW FERGUSON I must go, Ma, for my peace's sake Every minute that Jimmy's locked in jail is a burden on my mind I've mocked the man times and times for a coward, though he couldn't help his nature, but I'm worse nor him a hundred times

SARAH FERGUSON Be wheesht with you, son, be wheesht!

ANDREW FERGUSON Eating the heart out of me, it is Gnawing and gnawing! I never get the picture of Jimmy out of my mind! I run for miles this morning to try and tire myself out so's I could sleep and rest myself, but I can't get content nohow That's the way of it, Ma You understand me, Da, don't you?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son, I understand you

SARAH FERGUSON You can go to America, Andrew, the way your da said you could, and when you're safe you can send home a confession to save Jimmy That would do, wouldn't it?

JOHN FERGUSON *[eagerly clutching at the straw]* Ay, ay, that would do, Andrew

SARAH FERGUSON Or we could go ourselves and tell the peelers when you were safely out of it

HANNAH FERGUSON They might think it was a made-up thing

SARAH FERGUSON *[rounding on her]* Quit, you! It doesn't become you, Hannah, to be telling your brother what to do when it's your fault he's in the trouble he is

HANNAH FERGUSON Ma, Ma, don't say it

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, you can cry well enough, but that'll not save you from the blame If you'd taken Jimmy at the start

JOHN FERGUSON Sarah, woman, don't don't talk to her that way!

SARAH FERGUSON I will talk to her It was her that killed Witherow, and no one else It's her that ought to be hanged

ANDREW FERGUSON [*standing up and shouting at his mother*] Ma!

SARAH FERGUSON [*collapsing*] Am I to see my own son sent to the gallows? Am I to sit still and let you hang him between you? John, are you going to let Hannah drive Andrew to the jail?

ANDREW FERGUSON She's not driving me, Ma No one could

SARAH FERGUSON [*ignoring her son*] John, will you be content to let her

JOHN FERGUSON [*patiently*] I'm trying to discover God's will, Sarah

SARAH FERGUSON [*passionately*] I don't want God's will! I want my son! It's nothing to me what he done—he's my son! I don't care if he killed a hundred men—he's my son! I'll not let him go to the jail I'll take him away myself to some place where he'll be safe [*She goes over to ANDREW*] Get ready, Andrew, and we'll go away together the night Your da wanted you to go a minute since [*She tries to draw him away from his seat*] Come with me, son, and don't be heeding Hannah

ANDREW FERGUSON [*resisting her*] Don't, Ma [*He turns to his father*] Da!

JOHN FERGUSON I can't advise you, son Don't ask me I was weak a minute ago I forgot God's will Mebbe you're right, son but don't ask me to advise you I'm getting old, and I haven't the strength of mind I had one time

SARAH FERGUSON You'll never let him go and give himself up, will you? Oh, have you no nature at all, none of you? I thought you took pride in him, John!

JOHN FERGUSON I did take pride in him, but I take no pride in anything now I must have sinned bitterly against God to be punished this way It must have been something I done that's brought calamity on us I'd be willing to pay whatever price was demanded of me but Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON Da, a man must clean himself, mustn't he?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay Ay, son!

ANDREW FERGUSON It's no good other people doing things for him He must do them himself

JOHN FERGUSON Yes, yes

ANDREW FERGUSON And it's no good any one doing anything for me I must do it myself, Da Jimmy can't pay for me He can only pay for himself

SARAH FERGUSON I won't let you go son!

ANDREW FERGUSON If they were to hang Jimmy, Ma, or to keep him in jail for the rest of his life, do you think would I be happy?

SARAH FERGUSON Ah, but you could forget, son, in a new place We'd go where no one knew anything about us and begin all over again

ANDREW FERGUSON We'd know, Ma Oh, don't you mind what my da said to Jimmy "You can't hide from yourself"? There's nothing truer nor that

SARAH FERGUSON [*beating her breast*] Oh, will no one help me to keep my son safe? Will you all take him from me?

[*ANDREW goes to her and kisses her hair*]

ANDREW FERGUSON It's best this way, Ma You'll see that yourself some day

[*MRS FERGUSON clutches him to her*]

SARAH FERGUSON Don't leave me son

ANDREW FERGUSON I must, Ma, for my peace' sake! [*He kisses her and then releases himself from her embrace She buries her face on the table and sobs without restraint*] Will you come to the barracks with me, Da?

[*JOHN FERGUSON looks up piteously at his son His will fails him, and he puts out his hands in supplication to ANDREW, and then, recovering himself, draws them in again*]

JOHN FERGUSON Don't ask me, son, I couldn't bear it

ANDREW FERGUSON It'll be lonely going there by myself Will you come, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON [*quietly*] Ay, Andrew

ANDREW FERGUSON Thank you, Hannah

[*He puts on his coat and cap HANNAH picks up the garments which she threw aside when she first came into the kitchen, and puts them on There is silence, save for MRS FERGUSON'S sobs, while they do so*]

ANDREW FERGUSON Good night
Da!

JOHN FERGUSON [*without looking up*] Good night, Andrew!

[*ANDREW bends down to kiss his father, who draws him close to him*]

JOHN FERGUSON [*brokenly*] My son,
my son!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*chokingly*]
Da!

[*He releases himself and goes to his mother*]

ANDREW FERGUSON Good night,
Ma!

SARAH FERGUSON [*starting up and clinging to him*] No, no, Andrew, no!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*firmly*] Good
night, Ma!

[*He kisses her, and then gently releases himself from her clasp and puts her back into her chair*]

ANDREW FERGUSON [*to his father*]
I think John Luke'll be able to take care of the farm for a day or two, but I wouldn't trust him longer, Da. He's bone idle, that man, and you'd better get some one else as soon as you can. If you were to get some one that understood management, he would do rightly as a labourer if he was watched well. Arthur Cairnduff heard of a suitable person a while ago that might do.

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, son, ay.

ANDREW FERGUSON And Kerr, the butcher, 'll give you a good price for the bullock [*To HANNAH*] Are you ready, Hannah?

HANNAH FERGUSON Ay, Andrew!

ANDREW FERGUSON [*vaguely*] Well,
I'll bid you all good night.

JOHN FERGUSON Good night, son.

ANDREW FERGUSON I'll I'll
mebbe see you again some day!

[*He pauses for a moment, but his father does not reply. HANNAH opens the door and ANDREW goes out*]

ANDREW FERGUSON [*in the doorway*] The air's turned cold.

HANNAH FERGUSON [*to her father*]
I'll be back as soon as I can, Da!

[*She goes out, closing the door behind her. The sound rouses MRS FERGUSON, who sits up and gazes dazedly about her*]

SARAH FERGUSON Where are they?
They're not gone?

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, they've gone
Sit down, wife.

SARAH FERGUSON Oh, why did you
let them go? I can't let him go, John, I
can't let him go!

JOHN FERGUSON You must, Sarah. God has some purpose with us, and there's no use in holding out against God, for He knows, and we don't.

SARAH FERGUSON I won't let him
go! [*She goes to the door and opens it*]
I'll bring him back!

[*She goes out, shouting "Andrew! Andrew!" and leaves the door open*]

JOHN FERGUSON sits brooding before the fire for a few moments. Then he gets up, moving feebly, and goes across the room and shuts the door. When he has done so he stands for a moment or two gazing helplessly about the room. Then he goes back to his seat. As he sits down, his hand comes in contact with the open Bible. Almost mechanically he picks it up and begins to read where he left off when the Act began. His lips move as he reads to himself. Then he slowly reads aloud.]

JOHN FERGUSON "And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe?"

[*The door opens, and MRS FERGUSON, weeping, enters*]

SARAH FERGUSON They've gone! They wouldn't come back! It's not right to be sending him away like that! He's my only son, and I'm an old woman. You had no call to be sending him away.

JOHN FERGUSON Isn't he the only son I have too? Is it any easier for a father to give up his son nor it is for a mother? Has a man no pride in his child, and no grief when it dies or does wrong? Is it women only that can feel hurt? Woman, woman, your sorrow is no more nor mine, and mine is no more nor yours. We're just stricken together. Come here, Sarah! [*She comes to him*] Sit down, woman, here by the side of me, and give me a hold of your hand [*She sits down on the stool beside him*] We've been married a long while, Sarah, and shared our good fortune and our bad. We've had our pride and our humiliation. God's been good to us, and He's been bitter hard. But whatever it was, we've bore it together, haven't we?

SARAH FERGUSON Ay, John.

JOHN FERGUSON And we'll bear this together too, woman, won't we?

SARAH FERGUSON It's a hard thing for any one to bear. Your own son to be taken from you.

JOHN FERGUSON Ay, wife, it is, but we must just bear it, for God knows bet-

ter nor we do what's right to be done
[He takes up the Bible again] Listen to
 God's Word, Sarah, and that'll strengthen
 you *[He continues his reading]* "And the
 king said unto Cush, Is the young man
 Absalom safe? And Cush answered, The
 enemies of my lord the king, and all that
 rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that
 young man is And the king was much
 moved, and went up to the chamber over
 the gate, and wept and as he went *[his
 voice beginning to break]* thus he said, O
 my son Absalom, my son, my son Absa-
 lom! Would God I had died for thee, O
 Absalom, my son my son "

*[His voice ends in a sob The Bible falls
 from his hands on to his lap He sits
 staring into the fire There is a low
 wroan from his wife]*

THE END

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JOURNEY'S END

(1928)

BY

R C SHERRIFF

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN HARDY
LIEUT OSBORNE
PRIVATE MASON
2ND LIEUT RALEIGH
CAPTAIN STANHOPE
2ND LIEUT HIBBERT
COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR
THE COLONEL
2ND LIEUT TROTTER
GERMAN SOLDIER

THE SCENE—*A dug-out in the British trenches before St Quentin*

A few rough steps lead into the trench above, through a low doorway. A table occupies a good space of the dug-out floor. A wooden frame, covered with wire netting, stands against the left wall and serves the double purpose of a bed and a seat for the table. A wooden bench against the back wall makes another seat, and two boxes serve for the other sides. Another wire-covered bed is fixed in the right corner beyond the doorway.

Gloomy tunnels lead out of the dug-out to left and right.

Except for the table, beds, and seats, there is no furniture save the bottles holding the candles, and a few tattered magazine pictures pinned to the wall of girls in flimsy costumes.

The earth walls deaden the sounds of war, making them faint and far away, although the front line is only fifty yards ahead. The flames of the candles that burn day and night are steady in the still, damp air.

ACT ONE Evening on Monday, the 18th March, 1918

ACT TWO

Scene I Tuesday morning

Scene II Tuesday afternoon

ACT THREE

Scene I Wednesday afternoon

Scene II Wednesday night

Scene III Thursday, towards dawn

R C SHERRIFF

ROBERT CEDRIC SHERRIFF, the author of *Journey's End*, was born in Buckinghamshire in 1896 and was educated at Kingston Grammar School and at New College, Oxford. Just before the outbreak of the war he joined the staff of the Sun Insurance Company. During the war he served with the British forces, attaining the rank of captain in 1917 (Stanhope in *Journey's End* also was a captain at the age of twenty-one). After the war he re-entered the insurance offices as an obscure clerk, with the normal English devotion to sports (not "athletics") to offset the tedium of his prosaic occupation. He also had another hobby—amateur playwriting for various school and civic organizations. For the members of a Rowing Club who were seeking a play with no women characters he wrote *Journey's End*, drawing upon his most vivid memories of the war ten years past. He afterwards sent the manuscript to every commercial London manager, whose obliquity of judgment was unanimous. He also sent the play to Bernard Shaw, who replied, enigmatically, that "there is no need to burn his house down to roast his dinner." Finally, a fairy godfather of non-commercial drama, Maurice Browne, undertook the production of the play, which was publicly performed for the first time in January, 1929.

The play was an immediate and overwhelming success, it was played all over the world—at one time fifty-four companies were performing the tragedy. The New York production was undertaken with some misgiving: it was a war play with a depressing finale, it lacked romance and love interest, and it was radically British in language, characterization, and humor. But it won both critical and popular acclaim in New York as elsewhere. The temptation to compare it with *What Price Glory* is irresistible—but rather pointless: one might as well compare Times Square with a Bloomsbury square. *Journey's End* is as British as *What Price Glory* is American, but both have generic interest and faithfully illuminate life as it was lived on the French front in the convulsive years of the war. *Journey's End* is an account of the last two days of a small group of British officers in a dug-out, its plot turning on hero worship; *What Price Glory* is a virile comedy growing out of violent personal animosity. The American play has a faster rhythm, more sparkle, and a sharper irony; the English play achieves its effects without resorting to an Elizabethan virility of language. Yet through the quiet and beauty and common humanity of *Journey's End* there penetrates even more ominously the atmosphere of a world gone mad.

The humor is quiet and unforced, and arises from the amazing anomalies of trench life as well as from character. There are harrowing scenes of painful suffering; the protagonist is no conventional hero but a creature of passions and nerves and cowardly lapses; yet the tragedy serves the Aristotelean end of *Katharsis*, for it is, finally, uplifting and refining. There is no finer character in literature than Lieutenant Osborne, who devotes his last moments to his pipe and brave, comforting small-talk with the callow Raleigh. Above the reek of candles, whisky, rancid bacon, violent stews, sardines, and stale tobacco, above the deadly monotony, meanness, and savagery of war, rises the eternal mystery of man's incredible nobility—his contempt of danger, of life itself. Yet there is no false note, no spurious sentiment—no suggestion of theatricality, no unusual stagecraft, no apparent purpose except to piece together a series of true incidents in the lives of ten men.

Sherriff said in a newspaper interview: "In a writer the two things that matter above

everything else are that he should be keenly, hungrily, interested in his fellows, and that he should have the common experiences of his time. What tremendous experiences I have, for example, traveling in a tube train! Wondering what people there are behind those faces. Following my fellow passengers to their work, their play, and their homes! But if I had not had the experiences of the war, if I had not met all sorts of men when they were stripped of all disguise, I should not have had the key. On the other hand if I had not been a quite ordinary man, I should have got *Journey's End* all wrong."

Sherriff also is the author of *Badger's Green* (1930), a jolly comedy which would prove a bit puzzling to American audiences, as it concerns the stubborn fight of a suburban community against the vulgar intrusion of the "realtor" and his "developments." He has also used the story and characters of *Journey's End* in a novel by the same title. In 1936 he collaborated with Jeanne de Casalis in writing *St. Helena*, a play about Napoleon's last days. This period of anti-climax to an exciting career is in itself undramatic, and Sherriff's characteristic method of understatement results in a temperate and intelligent study which is too static for the theatre. In recent years he has been busy writing for the movies, but has found time for a spirited novel, *The Hopkins Manuscript*, which contains more liveliness and fancy than one would expect from the author of *Journey's End*.

JOURNEY'S END

ACT I

The evening of a March day A pale glimmer of moonlight shines down the narrow steps into one corner of the dug-out Warm yellow candle-flames light the other corner from the necks of two bottles on the table Through the doorway can be seen the musty gray parapet of a trench and a narrow strip of starlit sky A bottle of whiskey, a jar of water, and a mug stand on the table among a litter of papers and magazines An officer's equipment hangs in a jumbled mass from a nail in the wall

CAPTAIN HARDY, a red-faced, cheerful-looking man, is sitting on a box by the table, intently drying a sock over a candle-flame He wears a heavy trench-boot on his left leg, and his right foot, which is naked, is held above the damp floor by resting it on his left knee His right boot stands on the floor beside him As he carefully turns the sock this way and that—feeling it against his face to see if it is dry—he half sings, half hums a song—humming when he is not quite sure of the words, and marking time with the toes of his right foot

HARDY "One and Two it's with Maud and Lou,
Three and Four, two girls more,
Five and Six it's with—hm—hm—hm—
Seven, Eight, Clara and Caroline—"

[He lapses into an indefinite humming, and finishes with a lively burst]

"Tick!—Tock!—wind up the clock,
And we'll start the day over again"

[A man's legs appear in the moonlit trench above, and a tall, thin man comes slowly down the dug-out steps, stooping low to avoid the roof He takes his helmet off and reveals a fine head, with close-cropped, iron-gray hair He looks about forty-five—physically as hard as nails]

HARDY *[looking round]* Hullo, Osborne! Your fellows arriving?

OSBORNE *[kitching off his pack and*

dropping it in a corner] Yes They're just coming in

HARDY Splendid! Have a drink

OSBORNE Thanks

[He crosses and sits on the left-hand bed]

HARDY *[passing the whiskey and a mug]* Don't have too much water It's rather strong to-day

OSBORNE *[slowly mixing a drink]* I wonder what it is they put in the water

HARDY Some sort of disinfectant, I suppose

OSBORNE I'd rather have the microbes, wouldn't you?

HARDY I would—yes—

OSBORNE Well, cheero

HARDY Cheero Excuse my sock, won't you?

OSBORNE Certainly It's a nice-looking sock

HARDY It is rather, isn't it? Guaranteed to keep the feet dry Trouble is, it gets so wet doing it

OSBORNE Stanhope asked me to come and take over He's looking after the men coming in

HARDY Splendid! You know, I'm awfully glad you've come

OSBORNE I heard it was a quiet bit of line up here

HARDY Well, yes—in a way But you never know Sometimes nothing happens for hours on end, then—all of a sudden—"over she comes!"—rifle grenades—Minnies—and those horrid little things like pineapples—you know

OSBORNE I know

HARDY Swish—swish—swish—swish—bang!

OSBORNE All right—all right—I know

HARDY They simply blew us to bits yesterday Minnies—enormous ones, about twenty Three bang in the trench I really am glad you've come, I'm not simply being polite

OSBORNE Do much damage?

HARDY Awful A dug-out got blown up and came down in the men's tea They were frightfully annoyed

OSBORNE I know There's nothing worse than dirt in your tea

HARDY By the way, you know the big German attack's expected any day now?

OSBORNE It's been expected for the last month

HARDY Yes, but it's very near now, there's funny things happening over in the Boche country I've been out listening at night when it's quiet There's more transport than usual coming up—you can hear it rattling over the *pave* all night, more trains in the distance—puffing up and going away again, one after another, bringing up loads and loads of men—

OSBORNE Yes It's coming—pretty soon now

HARDY Are you here for six days?

OSBORNE Yes

HARDY Then I should think you'll get t—right in the neck

OSBORNE Well, you won't be far away Come along, let's do this handing over Where's the map?

HARDY Here we are [*He gropes among the papers on the table and finds a tattered map*] We hold about two hundred yards of front line We've got a Lewis gun just here—and one here, in this little ap Sentry posts where the crosses are—

OSBORNE Where do the men sleep?

HARDY I don't know The sergeant-major sees to that [*He points off to the left*] The servants and signallers sleep in here Two officers in here, and three in here [*He points to the right hand tunnel*] That is, if you've got five officers

OSBORNE We've only got four at present, but a new man's coming up to-night He arrived at transport lines a day or two ago

HARDY I hope you get better luck than I did with my last officer He got umbago the first night and went home Now he's got a job lecturing young officers on "Life in the Front Line"

OSBORNE Yes They do send some funny people over here nowadays I hope you're lucky and get a youngster straight from school They're the kind that do best

HARDY I suppose they are, really

OSBORNE Five beds, you say? [*He examines the one he is sitting on*] Is this the best one?

HARDY Oh, no [*He points to the bed in the right corner*] That's mine The ones in the other dug-out haven't got any bottoms to them You keep yourself in by angling your arms and legs over the sides

Mustn't hang your legs too low, or the rats gnaw your boots

OSBORNE You got many rats here?

HARDY I should say—roughly—about two million, but then, of course, I don't see them all [*He begins to put on his sock and draw on his boot*] Well, there's nothing else you want to know, is there?

OSBORNE You haven't told me anything yet

HARDY What else do you want to know?

OSBORNE Well, what about trench stores?

HARDY You are a fussy old man Anybody'd think you were in the army [*He finds a tattered piece of paper*] Here you are 115 rifle grenades—I shouldn't use them if I were you, they upset Jerry and make him offensive Besides, they are rusty, in any case Then there's 500 Mills bombs, 34 gum boots—

OSBORNE That's seventeen pairs—

HARDY Oh, no, twenty-five right leg, and nine left leg But everything's down here [*He hands the list to OSBORNE*]

OSBORNE Did you check it when you took over?

HARDY No I think the sergeant-major did It's quite all right

OSBORNE I expect Stanhope would like to see you before you go He always likes a word with the company commander he's relieving

HARDY How is the dear young boy? Drinking like a fish, as usual?

OSBORNE Why do you say that?

HARDY Well, damn it, it's just the natural thing to ask about Stanhope [*He pauses, and looks curiously at OSBORNE*] Poor old man It must be pretty rotten for you, being his second in command, and you such a quiet, sober old thing

OSBORNE He's a long way the best company commander we've got

HARDY Oh, he's a good chap, I know But I never *did* see a youngster put away the whisky he does D'you know, the last time we were out resting at Valennes he came to supper with us and drank a whole bottle in one hour fourteen minutes—we timed him

OSBORNE I suppose it amused everybody, I suppose everybody cheered him on, and said what a splendid achievement it was

HARDY He didn't want any "cheering" on—

OSBORNE No, but everybody thought it was a big thing to do [*There is a pause*] Didn't they?

HARDY Well, you can't help, somehow, *admiring* a fellow who can do that—and then pick out his own hat all by himself and walk home—

OSBORNE When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking, he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit. People pay with a bottle of whisky for the morbid curiosity of seeing him drink it.

HARDY Well, naturally, you're biased. You have to put him to bed when he gets home.

OSBORNE It rather reminds you of bear-baiting—or cock-fighting—to sit and watch a boy drink himself unconscious.

HARDY Well, damn it, it's pretty dull without *something* to liven people up. I mean, after all—Stanhope really *is* a sort of freak, I mean it *is* jolly fascinating to see a fellow drink like he does—glass after glass. He didn't go home on his last leave, did he?

OSBORNE No.

HARDY I suppose he didn't think he was fit to meet papa. [*A pause*] You know his father's vicar of a country village?

OSBORNE I know.

HARDY [*laughing*] Imagine Stanhope spending his leave in a country vicarage sipping tea! He spent his last leave in Paris, didn't he?

OSBORNE Yes.

HARDY I bet it was *some* leave!

OSBORNE Do you know how long he's been out here?

HARDY A good time, I know.

OSBORNE Nearly three years. He came out straight from school—when he was eighteen. He's commanded this company for a year—in and out of the front line. He's never had a rest. Other men come over here and go home ill, and young Stanhope goes on sticking it, month in and month out.

HARDY Oh, I know he's a jolly good fellow—

OSBORNE I've seen him on his back all day with trench fever—then on duty all night—

HARDY Oh, I know, he's a splendid chap!

OSBORNE And because he's stuck it till his nerves have got battered to bits, he's called a drunkard.

HARDY Not a drunkard, just a—just a hard drinker, but you're quite right about his nerves. They *are* all to blazes. Last time out resting we were playing bridge and something happened—I don't

remember what it was, some silly little argument—and all of a sudden he jumped up and knocked all the glasses off the table! Lost control of himself, and then he—sort of—came to—and cried—

OSBORNE Yes, I know.

HARDY You heard about it?

OSBORNE He told me.

HARDY Did he? We tried to hush it up. It just shows the state he's in. [*He rises and puts on his pack. There is a pause*] You know, Osborne, you ought to be commanding this company.

OSBORNE Rubbish!

HARDY Of course you ought. It sticks out a mile. I know he's got pluck and all that, but, damn it, man, you're twice his age—and think what a dear, level-headed old thing you are.

OSBORNE Don't be an ass. He was out here before I joined up. His experience alone makes him worth a dozen people like me.

HARDY You know as well as I do, you ought to be in command.

OSBORNE There isn't a man to touch him as a commander of men. He'll command the battalion one day if—

HARDY Yes, if! [*He laughs*]

OSBORNE You don't know him as I do, I love that fellow. I'd go to hell with him.

HARDY Oh, you sweet, sentimental old darling!

OSBORNE Come along. Finish handing over and stop blithering.

HARDY There's nothing else to do.

OSBORNE What about the log-book?

HARDY God! you are a worker. Oh, well. Here we are. [*He finds a tattered little book among the papers on the table*] Written right up to date, here's my last entry: "5 p.m. to 8 p.m. All quiet. German airman flew over trenches. Shot a rat."

OSBORNE Did he?

HARDY No. I shot the rat, you ass. Well, finish up your whisky. I want to pack my mug. I'll leave you that drop in the bottle.

OSBORNE Thanks.

[*He drinks up his whisky and hands HARDY the mug*]

HARDY [*tucking the mug into his pack*] I'll be off.

OSBORNE Aren't you going to wait and see Stanhope?

HARDY Well, no, I don't special, want to see him. He's so fussy about the trenches. I expect they *are* rather dirty. He'll talk for hours if he catches me. [*He*

hitches his pack over his shoulders, hangs on his gas satchel, map-case, binoculars, compass-case, until he looks like a traveling peddler As he dresses] Well, I hope you have a nice six days Don't forget to change your clothes if you get wet

OSBORNE No, Papa

HARDY And don't forget about the big attack

OSBORNE Oh, Lord, no, I mustn't miss that, I'll make a note in my diary

HARDY [*fully dressed*] There we are! Do I look every inch a soldier?

OSBORNE Yes I should get quite a fright if I were a German and met you coming round a corner

HARDY I should bloody well hope you would

OSBORNE Shouldn't be able to run away for laughing

HARDY Now, don't be rude [*He leans over to light a cigarette from a candle, and looks down on the table*] Well, I'm damned Still at it!

OSBORNE What is?

HARDY Why, that little cockroach It's been running round and round that candle since tea-time, must have done a mile

OSBORNE I shouldn't hang about here if I were a cockroach

HARDY Nor should I I'd go home Ever had cockroach races?

OSBORNE No

HARDY Great fun We've had 'em every evening

OSBORNE What are the rules?

HARDY Oh, you each have a cockroach, and start 'em in a line On the word "Go" you dig your cockroach in the ribs and steer him with a match across the table I won ten francs last night—had a splendid cockroach I'll give you a tip

OSBORNE Yes?

HARDY Promise not to let it go any farther?

OSBORNE Yes

HARDY Well, if you want to get the best pace out of a cockroach, dip it in whisky—makes 'em go like hell!

OSBORNE Right Thanks awfully

HARDY Well, I must be off Cheero!

OSBORNE Cheero!

HARDY [*goes up the narrow steps into the trench above, singing softly and happily to himself*]

"One and Two, it's with Maud and Lou, Three and Four, two girls more——"

[*The words trail away into the night*

OSBORNE rises and takes his pack from the floor to the bed by the

table While he undoes it a SOLDIER SERVANT comes out of the tunnel from the left with a tablecloth over his arm and a plate with half a loaf of bread on it]

MASON Excuse me, sir Can I lay supper?

OSBORNE Yes, do

[*He shuffles up the papers from the table and puts them on the bed*]

MASON Thank you, sir

[*He lays the table*]

OSBORNE What are you going to tempt us with to-night, Mason?

MASON Soup, sir—cutlets—and pineapple

OSBORNE [*suspiciously*] Cutlets?

MASON Well, sir—well, yes, sir!—cutlets

OSBORNE What sort of cutlets?

MASON Now, sir, you've got me I shouldn't like to commit meself too deep, sir

OSBORNE Ordinary ration meat?

MASON Yes, sir Ordinary ration meat, but a noo shape, sir Smells like liver, sir, but it 'asn't got that smooth, wet look that liver's got

[*MASON leaves the dug-out OSBORNE sits up to the table and examines the map Voices come from the trench above, a gruff voice says*] "This is 'C' Company 'Eadquarters, sir"

[*A boyish voice replies*] "Oh, thanks" [*There is a pause, then the gruff voice says*] "Better go down, sir"

[*The boyish voice replies*] "Yes Righto"

[*An OFFICER comes groping down the steps and stands in the candle-light He looks round, a little bewildered He is a well-built, healthy-looking boy of about eighteen, with the very new uniform of a 2nd lieutenant OSBORNE looks up from the trench map, surprised and interested to see a stranger*]

OSBORNE Hullo!

RALEIGH Good evening [*he notices OSBORNE'S gray hair and adds*] sir

OSBORNE You the new officer?

RALEIGH Er—yes I've been to Battalion Headquarters They told me to report here

OSBORNE Good We've been expecting you Sit down, won't you

RALEIGH Thanks

[*He sits gingerly on the box opposite OSBORNE*]

OSBORNE I should take your pack off

RALEIGH Oh, right

[*He slips his pack from his shoulders*]

OSBORNE Will you have a drink?

RALEIGH Er—well—

OSBORNE You don't drink whisky?

RALEIGH [*hastily*] Oh, yes—er—just a small one, sir

OSBORNE [*pouring out a small whisky and adding water*] Whisky takes away the taste of the water—

RALEIGH Oh, yes?

[*He pauses, and laughs nervously*]

OSBORNE —and the water takes away the taste of the whisky [*He hands RALEIGH the drink*] Just out from England?

RALEIGH Yes, I landed a week ago

OSBORNE Boulogne?

RALEIGH Yes [*A pause, then he self-consciously holds up his drink*] Well, here's luck, sir

OSBORNE [*taking a drink himself*] Good luck [*He takes out a cigarette case*] Cigarette?

RALEIGH Thanks

OSBORNE [*holding a bottle across so that RALEIGH can light his cigarette from the candle in it*] Ever been up in the line before?

RALEIGH Oh, no You see, I only left school at the end of last summer term

OSBORNE I expect you find it a bit strange

RALEIGH [*laughing*] Yes—I do—a bit—

OSBORNE My name's Osborne I'm second in command of the company You only call me "sir" in front of the men

RALEIGH I see Thanks

OSBORNE You'll find the other officers call me "Uncle"

RALEIGH Oh, yes? [*He smiles*]

OSBORNE What's your name?

RALEIGH Raleigh

OSBORNE I knew a Raleigh A master at Rugby

RALEIGH Oh? He may be a relation I don't know I've got lots of uncles and —and things like that

OSBORNE We've only just moved into these trenches Captain Stanhope commands the company

RALEIGH [*suddenly brightening up*] I know It's a frightful bit of luck

OSBORNE Why? D'you know him?

RALEIGH Yes, rather! We were at school together—at least—of course—I was only a kid and he was one of the big fellows, he's three years older than I am

[*There is a pause, OSBORNE seems to*

be waiting for RALEIGH to go on, then suddenly he says]

OSBORNE He's up in the front line at present, looking after the relief [*Another pause*] He's a splendid chap

RALEIGH Isn't he? He was skipper of football at Barford, and kept wicket for the eleven A jolly good bat, too

OSBORNE Did you play football—and cricket?

RALEIGH Oh, yes Of course, I wasn't in the same class as Dennis—I say, I suppose I ought to call him Captain Stanhope?

OSBORNE Just "Stanhope"

RALEIGH I see Thanks

OSBORNE Did you get your colors?

RALEIGH I did for football Not cricket

OSBORNE Football and cricket seem a long way from here

RALEIGH [*laughing*] They do, rather

OSBORNE We play a bit when we're out of the line

RALEIGH Good!

OSBORNE [*thoughtfully*] So you were at school with Stanhope [*Pause*] I wonder if he'll remember you? I expect you've grown in the last three years

RALEIGH Oh, I think he'll remember me [*He stops, and goes on rather awkwardly*] You see, it wasn't only that we were just at school together, our fathers were friends, and Dennis used to come and stay with us in the holidays Of course, at school I didn't see much of him, but in the holidays we were terrific pals

OSBORNE He's a fine company commander

RALEIGH I bet he is Last time he was on leave he came down to school, he'd just got his M C and been made a captain He looked splendid! It sort of—made me feel —

OSBORNE —keen?

RALEIGH Yes Keen to get out here I was frightfully keen to get into Dennis's regiment I thought, perhaps, with a bit of luck I might get to the same battalion

OSBORNE It's a big fluke to have got to the same company

RALEIGH I know It's an amazing bit of luck When I was at the base I did an awful thing You see, my uncle's at the base—he has to detail officers to regu-

ments—

OSBORNE General Raleigh?

RALEIGH Yes I went to see him on the quiet and asked him if he could get me into this battalion He bit my head

off, and said I'd got to be treated like everybody else—

OSBORNE Yes?

RALEIGH —and next day I was told I *was* coming to this battalion Funny, wasn't it?

OSBORNE Extraordinary coincidence!

RALEIGH And when I got to Battalion Headquarters, and the colonel told me to report to "C" Company, I could have cheered I expect Dennis'll be frightfully surprised to see me I've got a message for him

OSBORNE From the colonel?

RALEIGH No From my sister

OSBORNE Your sister?

RALEIGH Yes You see, Dennis used to stay with us, and naturally my sister [*he hesitates*]—well—perhaps I ought not—

OSBORNE That's all right I didn't actually know that Stanhope—

RALEIGH They're not—er—officially engaged—

OSBORNE No?

RALEIGH She'll be awfully glad I'm with him here, I can write and tell her about him He doesn't say much in his letters, can we write often?

OSBORNE Oh, yes Letters are collected every day [*There is a pause*]

RALEIGH You don't think Dennis'll mind my—sort of—forcing myself into his company? I never thought of that, I was so keen

OSBORNE No, of course he won't [*Pause*] You say it's—it's a good time since you last saw him?

RALEIGH Let's see It was in the summer last year—nearly a year ago

OSBORNE You know, Raleigh, you mustn't expect to find him—quite the same

RALEIGH Oh?

OSBORNE You see, he's been out here a long time It—it tells on a man—rather badly—

RALEIGH [*thinking*] Yes, of course, I suppose it does

OSBORNE You may find he's—he's a little bit quick-tempered

RALEIGH [*laughing*] Oh, I know old Dennis's temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whisky Lord! the roof nearly blew off He gave them a dozen each with a cricket stump [*OSBORNE laughs*] He was so keen on the fellows in the house keeping fit He was frightfully down on smoking—and that sort of thing

OSBORNE You must remember he's

commanded this company for a long time—through all sorts of rotten times It's—it's a big strain on a man

RALEIGH Oh, it must be

OSBORNE If you notice a—difference in Stanhope—you'll know it's only the strain—

RALEIGH Oh, yes

[*OSBORNE rouses himself and speaks briskly*]

OSBORNE Now, let's see We've got five beds here—one each Two in here and three in that dug-out there I'm afraid you'll have to wait until the others come and pick the beds they want

RALEIGH Righto!

OSBORNE Have you got a blanket?

RALEIGH Yes, in my pack

[*He rises to get it*]

OSBORNE Better wait and unpack when you know where you're sleeping

RALEIGH Righto!

[*He sits down again*]

OSBORNE We never undress when we're in the line You can take your boots off now and then in the daytime, but it's better to keep pretty well dressed always

RALEIGH I see Thanks

OSBORNE I expect we shall each do about three hours on duty at a time and then six off We all go on duty at stand-to That's at dawn and dusk

RALEIGH Yes

OSBORNE I expect Stanhope'll send you on duty with one of us at first—till you get used to it

[*There is a pause RALEIGH turns, and looks curiously up the steps into the night*]

RALEIGH Are we in the front line here?

OSBORNE No That's the support line outside The front line's about fifty yards farther on

RALEIGH How frightfully quiet it is!

OSBORNE It's often quiet—like this

RALEIGH I thought there would be an awful row here—all the time

OSBORNE Most people think that

[*Pause*]

RALEIGH I've never known anything so quiet as those trenches we came by, just now and then I heard rifle firing, like the range at Bisley, and a sort of rumble in the distance

OSBORNE Those are the guns up north—up Wipers way The guns are always going up there, it's never quiet like this [*Pause*] I expect it's all very strange to you?

RALEIGH It's—it's not exactly what

I thought It's just this—this quiet that seems so funny

OSBORNE A hundred yards from here the Germans are sitting in *their* dug-outs, thinking how quiet it is

RALEIGH Are they as near as that?

OSBORNE About a hundred yards

RALEIGH It seems—uncanny It makes me feel we're—we're all just waiting for something

OSBORNE We are, generally, just waiting for something When anything happens, it happens quickly Then we just start waiting again

RALEIGH I never thought it was like that

OSBORNE You thought it was fighting all the time?

RALEIGH [*laughing*] Well, yes, in a way

OSBORNE [*after puffing at his pipe in silence for a while*] Did you come up by trench to-night—or over the top?

RALEIGH By trench An amazing trench—turning and twisting for miles, over a sort of plain

OSBORNE Lancer's Alley it's called

RALEIGH Is it? It's funny the way it begins—in that ruined village, a few steps down into the cellar of a house—then right under the house and through a little garden—and then under the garden wall—then alongside an enormous ruined factory place—then miles and miles of plains, with those green lights bobbing up and down ahead—all along the front as far as you can see

OSBORNE Those are the Very lights Both sides fire them over No Man's Land—to watch for raids and patrols

RALEIGH I knew they fired lights [*Pause*] I didn't expect so many—and to see them so far away

OSBORNE I know [*He puffs at his pipe*] There's something rather romantic about it all

RALEIGH [*eagerly*] Yes, I thought that, too

OSBORNE You must always think of it like that if you can Think of it all as—as romantic It helps

[*MASON comes in with more dinner utensils*]

MASON D'you expect the captain soon, sir? The soup's 'ot

OSBORNE He ought to be here very soon now This is Mr Raleigh, Mason

MASON Good evening, sir

RALEIGH Good evening

MASON [*to OSBORNE*] I've 'ad rather a unpleasant surprise, sir

OSBORNE What's happened?

MASON You know that tin o' pineapple chunks I got, sir?

OSBORNE Yes?

MASON Well, sir, I'm sorry to say it's apricots

OSBORNE Good heavens! It must have given you a turn

MASON I distinctly said "pineapple chunks" at the canteen

OSBORNE Wasn't there a label on the tin?

MASON No, sir I pointed that out to the man I said was 'e *certain* it was pineapple chunks?

OSBORNE I suppose he said he was

MASON Yes, sir 'E said a leopard can't change its spots, sir

OSBORNE What have leopards got to do with pineapple?

MASON That's just what I thought, sir Made me *think* there was something fishy about it You see, sir, I know the captain can't stand the sight of apricots 'E said next time we 'ad them 'e'd wring my neck

OSBORNE Haven't you anything else?

MASON There's a pink blanchmange I've made, sir But it ain't anywhere near stiff yet

OSBORNE Never mind We must have the apricots and chance it

MASON Only I thought I'd tell you, sir so as the captain wouldn't blame me

OSBORNE All right, Mason [*Voices are heard in the trench above*] That sounds like the captain coming now

MASON [*hastening away*] I'll go and dish out the soup, sir

[*The voices grow nearer, two figures appear in the trench above and grope down the steps—the leading figure tall and thin, the other short and fat The tall figure is CAPTAIN STANHOPE At the bottom of the steps he straightens himself, pulls off his pack and drops it on the floor Then he takes off his helmet and throws it on the right-hand bed Despite his stars of rank he is no more than a boy, tall slimly built, but broad-shouldered His dark hair is carefully brushed, his uniform, though old and war-stained, is well cut and cared for He is good-looking, rather from attractive features than the healthy good looks of* RALEIGH *Although tanned by months in the open air, there is a pallor under his skin and dark shadows under his eyes His short and fat companion—2ND LIEUTENANT*

TROTTER—*is middle-aged and homely-looking His face is red, fat, and round, apparently he has put on weight during his war service, for his tunic appears to be on the verge of bursting at the waist He carries an extra pack belonging to the officer left on duty in the line*

STANHOPE *[as he takes off his pack, gas satchel, and belt]* Has Hardy gone?

OSBORNE Yes He cleared off a few minutes ago

STANHOPE Lucky for him he did I had a few words to say to Master Hardy You never saw the blasted mess those fellows left the trenches in Dug-outs smell like cess-pits, rusty bombs, damp rifle grenades, it's perfectly foul Where are the servants?

OSBORNE In there

STANHOPE *[calling into MASON'S dug-out]* Hi! Mason!

MASON *[outside]* Coming, sir! Just bringing the soup, sir

STANHOPE *[taking a cigarette from his case and lighting it]* Damn the soup! Bring some whisky!

OSBORNE Here's a new officer, Stanhope—just arrived

STANHOPE Oh, sorry *[He turns and peers into the dim corner where RALEIGH stands smiling awkwardly]* I didn't see you in this miserable light

[He stops short at the sight of RALEIGH There is silence]

RALEIGH Hullo, Stanhope!

[STANHOPE stares at RALEIGH as though dazed RALEIGH takes a step forward, half raises his hand, then lets it drop to his side]

STANHOPE *[in a low voice]* How did you—get here?

RALEIGH I was told to report to your company, Stanhope

STANHOPE Oh I see Rather a coincidence

RALEIGH *[with a nervous laugh]* Yes

[There is a silence for a moment, broken by OSBORNE in a matter-of-fact voice]

OSBORNE I say, Stanhope, it's a terrible business We thought we'd got a tin of pineapple chunks it turns out to be apricots

TROTTER Ha! Give me apricots every time! I ate pineapple chunks, too bloom-in' sickly for me!

RALEIGH I'm awfully glad I got to your company, Stanhope

STANHOPE When did you get here?

RALEIGH Well, I've only just come

OSBORNE He came up with the transport while you were taking over

STANHOPE I see

[MASON brings in a bottle of whisky, a mug, and two plates of soup—so precariously that OSBORNE has to help with the soup plates on to the table]

STANHOPE *[with sudden forced gaiety]* Come along, Uncle! Come and sit here *[He waves towards the box on the right of the table]* You better sit there, Raleigh

RALEIGH Right!

TROTTER *[taking a pair of pince-nez from his tunic pocket, putting them on, and looking curiously at RALEIGH]* You Raleigh?

RALEIGH Yes *[Pause]*

TROTTER I'm Trotter

RALEIGH Oh, yes? *[Pause]*

TROTTER How are you?

RALEIGH Oh, all right, thanks

TROTTER Been out 'ere before?

RALEIGH No

TROTTER Feel a bit odd, I s'pose?

RALEIGH Yes A bit

TROTTER *[getting a box to sit on]*

Oh, well, you'll soon get used to it, you'll feel you've been 'ere a year in about an hour's time

[He puts the box on its side and sits on it It is too low for the table, and he puts it on its end It is then too high He tries the other side, which is too low, he finally contrives to make himself comfortable by sitting on his pack, placed on the side of the box MASON arrives with two more plates of soup]

OSBORNE What kind of soup is this, Mason?

MASON It's yellow soup, sir

OSBORNE It's got a very deep yellow flavor

TROTTER *[taking a melodious sip]* It wants some pepper, bring some pepper, Mason

MASON *[anxiously]* I'm very sorry, sir When the mess box was packed the pepper was omitted, sir

TROTTER *[throwing his spoon with a clatter into the plate]* Oh, I say, but damn it!

OSBORNE We must have pepper It's a disinfectant

TROTTER You must have pepper in soup!

STANHOPE *[quietly]* Why wasn't it packed, Mason?

MASON It—it was missed, sir

STANHOPE Why?

MASON [*miserably*] Well, sir, I left it to—

STANHOPE Then I advise you never to leave it to any one else again—unless you want to rejoin your platoon out there

[*He points into the moonlit trench*]

MASON I'm—I'm very sorry, sir

STANHOPE Send one of the signalers

MASON Yes, sir [*He hastens to the tunnel entrance and calls*] Bert, you're wanted!

[*A SOLDIER appears, with a rifle slung over his shoulder He stands stiffly to attention*]

STANHOPE Do you know "A" Company Headquarters?

SOLDIER Yes, sir

STANHOPE Go there at once and ask Captain Willis, with my compliments, if he can lend me a little pepper

SOLDIER Very good, sir

[*He turns smartly and goes up the steps, MASON stopping him for a moment to say confidentially "A screw of pepper you ask for"*]

OSBORNE We must have pepper

TROTTER I mean—after all—war's bad enough with pepper—[*noisy sip*]—but war without pepper—it's—it's bloody awful!

OSBORNE What's it like outside?

TROTTER Quiet as an empty 'ouse There's a nasty noise going on up north

OSBORNE Wipers, I expect I believe there's trouble up there I wish we knew more of what's going on

TROTTER So do I Still, my wife reads the papers every morning and writes and tells me

OSBORNE Hardy says they had a lively time here yesterday Three big Minnies right in the trench

TROTTER I know And they left the bloomin' 'oles for us to fill in [MASON arrives with cutlets on enamel plates]

What's this?

MASON Meat, sir

TROTTER I know that What sort?

MASON Sort of cutlet, sir

TROTTER Sort of cutlet, is it? You know, Mason, there's cutlets and cutlets

MASON I know, sir, that one's a cutlet

TROTTER Well, it won't let me cut it

MASON No, sir?

TROTTER That's a joke

MASON Oh Right, sir [*He goes out*]

OSBORNE [*studying the map*] There's a sort of ruin marked on this map—just

in front of here, in No Man's Land—called Beauvais Farm

TROTTER That's what we saw sticking up, skipper I wondered what it was

STANHOPE Better go out and look at it to-night

TROTTER I 'ate ruins in No Man's Land, too bloomin' creepy for me

OSBORNE There's only about sixty yards of No Man's Land, according to this map—narrower on the left, from the head of this sap, only about fifty

TROTTER [*who has been looking curiously at STANHOPE, eating his meal with lowered head*] Cheer up, skipper You do look glum!

STANHOPE I'm tired

OSBORNE I should turn in and get some sleep after supper

STANHOPE I've got hours of work before I sleep

OSBORNE I'll do the duty roll and see the sergeant-major—and all that

STANHOPE That's all right, Uncle I'll see to it [*He turns to RALEIGH for the first time*] Trotter goes on duty directly he's had supper You better go on with him—to learn

RALEIGH Oh, right

TROTTER Look 'ere, skipper, it's nearly eight now, couldn't we make it 'alf-past?

STANHOPE No I told Hibbert he'd be relieved at eight Will you take from eleven till two, Uncle?

OSBORNE Right

STANHOPE Hibbert can do from two till four, and I'll go on from then till stand-to That'll be at six

TROTTER Well, boys! 'Ere we are for six days again Six bloomin' eternal days [*He makes a calculation on the table*]

That's a hundred and forty-four hours, eight thousand six 'undred and forty minutes That doesn't sound so bad, we've done twenty of 'em already I've got an idea! I'm going to draw a hundred and forty-four little circles on a bit o' paper, and every hour I'm going to black one in, that'll make the time go all right

STANHOPE It's five to eight now You better go and relieve Hibbert Then you can come back at eleven o'clock and black in three of your bloody little circles

TROTTER I 'aven't 'ad my apricot yet!

STANHOPE We'll keep your apricots till you come back

TROTTER I never knew anything like a war for upsetting meals I'm always down for dooty in the middle of one

STANHOPE That's because you never stop eating

TROTTER Any'ow, let's 'ave some coffee Hi! Mason! Coffee!

MASON Coming, sir!

TROTTER [*getting up*] Well, I'll get dressed Come on, Raleigh

RALEIGH [*rising quickly*] Right!

TROTTER Just wear your belt with revolver case on it Must have your revolver to shoot rats And your gas mask—come here—I'll show you [*He helps RALEIGH*] You wear it sort of tucked up under your chin like a serviette

RALEIGH Yes I was shown the way at home

TROTTER Now your hat That's right You don't want a walking-stick It gets in your way if you have to run fast

RALEIGH Why—er—do you have to run fast?

TROTTER Oh, Lord, yes, often! If you see a Minnie coming—that's a big trench-mortar shell, you know—short for *Munnywerfer*—you see 'em coming right out of the Boche trenches, right up in the air, then down, down, down, and you have to judge it and run like stink sometimes

[*MASON comes in with two cups of coffee*]

MASON Coffee, sir?

TROTTER Thanks

[*He takes the cup and drinks standing up*]

RALEIGH Thanks

TROTTER You might leave my apricots out, Mason Put 'em on a separate plate and keep 'em in there

[*He points to MASON'S dug-out*]

MASON Very good, sir

TROTTER If you bring 'em in 'ere you never know *what* might 'appen to 'em

MASON No, sir

TROTTER "B" Company on our right, aren't they, skipper?

STANHOPE Yes There's fifty yards of undefended area in between You bet ter patrol that a good deal

TROTTER Aye, aye, sir

STANHOPE Have a look at that Lewis gun position on the left See what field of fire they've got

TROTTER Aye, aye, sir You don't want me to go out and look at that blunkin' ruin?

STANHOPE I'll see to that

TROTTER Good I don't fancy crawling about on my belly after that cutlet

[*To RALEIGH*] Well, come on, my lad, let's go and see about this 'ere war

[*The two go up the steps, leaving STANHOPE and OSBORNE alone*]

[*MASON appears at his dug-out door*]

MASON Will you take apricots, sir?

STANHOPE No, thanks

MASON Mr Osborne?

OSBORNE No, thanks

MASON I'm sorry about them being apricots, sir I explained to Mr Osborne—

STANHOPE [*curtly*] That's all right, Mason—thank you

MASON Very good, sir [*He goes out*]

OSBORNE [*over by the right-hand bed*] Will you sleep here? This was Hardy's bed

STANHOPE No You sleep there I'd rather sleep by the table here I can get up and work without disturbing you

OSBORNE This is a better one

STANHOPE You take it Must have a little comfort in your old age, Uncle

OSBORNE I wish you'd turn in and sleep for a bit

STANHOPE Sleep?—I can't sleep [*He takes a whisky and water A man appears in the trench and comes down the steps—a small, slightly built man in the early twenties, with a little mustache and a palld face Looking hard at the new-comer*] Well, Hibbert?

HIBBERT Everything's fairly quiet Bit of sniping somewhere to our left, some rifles grenades coming over just on our right

STANHOPE I see Mason's got your supper

HIBBERT [*gently rubbing his forehead*] I don't think I can manage any supper to-night, Stanhope It's this beastly neuralgia It seems to be right inside this eye The beastly pain gets worse every day

STANHOPE Some hot soup and a good tough chop'll put that right

HIBBERT I'm afraid the pain rather takes my appetite away I'm damn sorry to keep on talking about it, Stanhope, only I thought you'd wonder why I don't eat anything much

STANHOPE Try and forget about it

HIBBERT [*with a little laugh*] Well—I wish I could

STANHOPE Get tight

HIBBERT I think I'll turn straight in for a rest—and try and get some sleep

STANHOPE All right Turn in You're in that dug-out there Here's your pack

[*He picks up the pack that TROTTER brought down*] You go on duty at two I take over from you at four I'll tell Mason to call you

HIBBERT [*faintly*] Oh, right—thanks, Stanhope—cheero

STANHOPE Cheero

[*He watches HIBBERT go down the tunnel into the dark*]

HIBBERT [*returning*] Can I have a candle?

STANHOPE [*taking one from the table*] Here you are

HIBBERT Thanks

[*He goes out again There is silence*]

STANHOPE turns to OSBORNE

STANHOPE Another little worm trying to wriggle home

OSBORNE [*filling his pipe*] I wonder if he really is bad He looks rotten

STANHOPE Pure bloody funk, that's all He could eat if he wanted to, he's starving himself purposely Artful little swine! Neuralgia's a splendid idea No proof as far as I can see

OSBORNE You can't help feeling sorry for him I think he's tried hard

STANHOPE How long's he been out here? Three months, I suppose Now he's decided he's done his bit He's decided to go home and spend the rest of the war in comfortable nerve hospitals Well, he's mistaken I let Warren get away like that, but no more

OSBORNE I don't see how you can prevent a fellow going sick

STANHOPE I'll have a quiet word with the doctor before he does He thinks he's going to wriggle off before the attack We'll just see about that No man of mine's going sick before the attack They're going to take an equal chance—together

OSBORNE Raleigh looks a nice chap

STANHOPE [*looking hard at OSBORNE before replying*] Yes

OSBORNE Good-looking youngster At school with you, wasn't he?

STANHOPE Has he been talking already?

OSBORNE He just mentioned it It was a natural thing to tell me when he knew you were in command [STANHOPE is lounging at the table with his back to the wall OSBORNE, sitting on the right-hand bed, begins to puff clouds of smoke into the air as he lights his pipe] He's awfully pleased to get into your company [STANHOPE makes no reply He picks up a pencil and scribbles on the back of a magazine] He seems to think a lot of you

STANHOPE [*looking up quickly at OSBORNE and laughing*] Yes, I'm his hero

OSBORNE It's quite natural

STANHOPE You think so?

OSBORNE Small boys at school generally have their heroes

STANHOPE Yes Small boys at school do

OSBORNE Often it goes on as long as—

STANHOPE —as long as the hero's a hero

OSBORNE It often goes on all through life

STANHOPE I wonder How many battalions are there in France?

OSBORNE Why?

STANHOPE We'll say fifty divisions That's a hundred and fifty brigades—four hundred and fifty battalions That's one thousand eight hundred companies [*He looks up at OSBORNE from his calculations on the magazine cover*] There are one thousand eight hundred companies in France, Uncle Raleigh might have been sent to any one of those, and, my God! he comes to mine

OSBORNE You ought to be glad He's a good-looking youngster I like him

STANHOPE I knew you'd like him Personality, isn't it? [*He takes a worn leather case from his breast pocket and hands a small photograph to OSBORNE*] I've never shown you that, have I?

OSBORNE [*looking at the photograph*] No [*Pause*] Raleigh's sister, isn't it?

STANHOPE How did you know?

OSBORNE There's a strong likeness

STANHOPE I suppose there is

OSBORNE [*intent on the picture*] She's an awfully nice-looking girl

STANHOPE A photo doesn't show much, really Just a face

OSBORNE She looks awfully nice [*There is silence STANHOPE lights a cigarette OSBORNE hands the photo back*] You're a lucky chap

STANHOPE [*putting the photo back into his case*] I don't know why I keep it, really

OSBORNE Why? Isn't she—I thought—

STANHOPE What did you think?

OSBORNE Well, I thought that perhaps she was waiting for you

STANHOPE Yes She is waiting for me—and she doesn't know She thinks I'm a wonderful chap—commanding a company [*He turns to OSBORNE and points up the steps into the line*] She doesn't

know that if I went up those steps into the front line—without being doped with whisky—I'd go mad with fright

[*There is a pause OSBORNE starts himself to speak*]

OSBORNE Look here, old man I've meant to say it for a long time, but it sounds like damned impudence You've done longer out here than any man in the battalion It's time you went away for a rest It's due to you

STANHOPE You suggest that I go sick, like that little worm in there—neuralgia in the eye?

[*He laughs and takes a drink*]

OSBORNE No Not that The colonel would have sent you down long ago, only—

STANHOPE Only—what?

OSBORNE Only he can't spare you

STANHOPE [*laughing*] Oh, rot!

OSBORNE He told me

STANHOPE He thinks I'm in such a state I want a rest, is that it?

OSBORNE No He thinks it's due to you

STANHOPE It's all right, Uncle I'll stick it out now It may not be much longer now I've had my share of luck—more than my share There's not a man left who was here when I came But it's rather damnable for that boy—of all the boys in the world—to have come to me I might at least have been spared that

OSBORNE You're looking at things in rather a black sort of way

STANHOPE I've just told you That boy's a hero-worshiper I'm three years older than he is You know what that means at school I was skipper of football and all that sort of thing It doesn't sound much to a man out here—but it does at school with a kid of fourteen Damn it, Uncle, you're a schoolmaster, you know

OSBORNE I've just told you what I think of hero-worship

STANHOPE Raleigh's father knew mine, and I was told to keep an eye on the kid I rather liked the idea of looking after him I made him keen on the right things—and all that His people asked me to stay with them one summer I met his sister then—

OSBORNE Yes?

STANHOPE At first I thought of her as another kid like Raleigh It was just before I came out here for the first time that I realized what a topping girl she was Funny how you realize it suddenly I just prayed to come through the war—and—

and do things—and keep absolutely fit for her

OSBORNE You've done pretty well An M C and a company

STANHOPE [*taking another whisky*] It was all right at first When I went home on leave after the first six months it was jolly fine to feel I'd done a little to make her pleased [*He takes a gulp of his drink*] It was after I came back here—in that awful affair on Vimy Ridge I knew I'd go mad if I didn't break the strain I couldn't bear being fully conscious all the time—you've felt that, Uncle, haven't you?

OSBORNE Yes, often

STANHOPE There were only two ways of breaking the strain One was pretending I was ill—and going home, the other was this [*He holds up his glass*] Which would you pick, Uncle?

OSBORNE I haven't been through as much as you I don't know yet

STANHOPE I thought it all out It's a slimy thing to go home if you're not really ill, isn't it?

OSBORNE I think it is

STANHOPE Well, then [*He holds his glass up to OSBORNE*] Cheero, and long live the men who go home with neuralgia [*He puts his glass down*] I didn't go home on my last leave I couldn't bear to meet her, in case she realized—

OSBORNE When the war's over—and the strain's gone—you'll soon be as fit as ever, at your age

STANHOPE I've hoped that all the time I'd go away for months and live in the open air—and get fit—and then go back to her

OSBORNE And so you can

STANHOPE If Raleigh had gone to one of those other one thousand eight hundred companies

OSBORNE I don't see why you should think—

STANHOPE Oh, for Lord's sake, don't be a damn fool You know! You know he'll write and tell her I reek of whisky all day

OSBORNE Why should he? He's not a—

STANHOPE Exactly He's not a damned little swine who'd deceive his sister

OSBORNE He's very young, he's got hundreds of strange things to learn, he'll realize that men are—different—out here

STANHOPE It's no good, Uncle Didn't you see him sitting there at supper?—staring at me?—and wondering? He's up

in those trenches now—still wondering—and beginning to understand All these months he's wanted to be with me out here Poor little devil!

OSBORNE I believe Raleigh'll go on liking you—and looking up to you—through everything There's something very deep and rather fine about hero-worship

STANHOPE Hero-worship be damned! [He pauses, then goes on, in a strange, high-pitched voice] You know, Uncle, I'm an awful fool I'm captain of this company What's that bloody little prig of a boy matter? D'you see? He's a little prig Wants to write home and tell Madge all about me Well, he won't, d'you see, Uncle? He won't write Censorship! I censor his letters—cross out all he says about me

OSBORNE You can't read his letters! STANHOPE [dreamily] Cross out all he says about me Then we all go west in the big attack—and she goes on thinking I'm a fine fellow forever—and ever—and ever

[He pours out a drink, murmuring "Ever—and ever—and ever"]

OSBORNE [rising from his bed] It's not as bad as all that Turn in and have a sleep

STANHOPE Sleep! Catch me wasting my time with sleep

OSBORNE [picking up STANHOPE'S pack and pulling out the blanket] Come along, old chap You come and lie down here

[He puts the pack as a pillow on STANHOPE'S bed, and spreads out the blanket]

STANHOPE [with his chin in his hands] Little prig—that's what he is Did I ask him to force his way into my company? No! I didn't Very well, he'll pay for his damn cheek [OSBORNE lays his hand gently on STANHOPE'S shoulder to persuade him to lie down] Go away! [He shakes OSBORNE'S hand off] What the hell are you trying to do?

OSBORNE Come and lie down and go to sleep

STANHOPE Go sleep y'self I censor his letters, d'you see, Uncle? You watch and see he doesn't smuggle any letters away

OSBORNE Righto Now come and lie down You've had a hard day of it

STANHOPE [looking up suddenly] Where's Hardy? D'you say he's gone?

OSBORNE Yes He's gone

STANHOPE Gone, has he? Y'know, I

had a word to say to Master Hardy He would go, the swine! Dirty trenches—everything dirty—I wanner tell him to keep his trenches clean

OSBORNE [standing beside STANHOPE and putting his hand gently on his shoulder again] We'll clean them up to-morrow

[STANHOPE looks up at OSBORNE and laughs gaily]

STANHOPE Dear old Uncle! Clean trenches up—with little dust pan and brush [He laughs] Make you a little apron—with lace on it

OSBORNE That'll be fine Now then, come along, old chap I'll see you get called at two o'clock [He firmly takes STANHOPE by the arm and draws him over to the bed] You must be tired

STANHOPE [in a dull voice] God, I'm bloody tired, ache—all over—feel sick—

[OSBORNE helps him on to the bed, takes the blanket and puts it over him]

OSBORNE You'll feel all right in a minute How's that? Comfortable?

STANHOPE Yes Comfortable [He looks up into OSBORNE'S face and laughs again] Dear old Uncle Tuck me up

[OSBORNE jumbles the blankets round STANHOPE]

OSBORNE There we are

STANHOPE Kiss me, Uncle

OSBORNE Kiss you be blowed! You go to sleep

STANHOPE [closing his eyes] Yes—I go sleep

[He turns slowly on to his side with his face to the earth wall OSBORNE stands watching for a while, then blows out the candle by STANHOPE'S bed STANHOPE gives a deep sigh, and begins to breathe heavily OSBORNE crosses to the servant's dug-out and calls softly]

OSBORNE Mason!

MASON [appearing with unbuttoned tunic at the tunnel entrance] Yessir?

OSBORNE Will you call me at ten minutes to eleven—and Mr Hibbert at ten minutes to two? I'm going to turn in for a little while

MASON Very good, sir [Pause] The pepper's come, sir

OSBORNE Oh, good

MASON I'm very sorry about the pepper, sir

OSBORNE That's all right, Mason

MASON Good night, sir

OSBORNE Good night

[MASON leaves the dug-out OS-

BORNE turns, and looks up the narrow steps into the night, where the Very lights rise and fade against the starlit sky He glances once more at STANHOPE, then crosses to his own bed, takes out from his tunic a large, old-fashioned watch, and quietly winds it up Through the stillness comes the low rumble of distant guns]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I—Early next morning

A pale shaft of sunlight shines down the steps, but candles still burn in the dark corner where OSBORNE and RALEIGH are at breakfast MASON has put a large plate of bacon before each, and turns to go as TROTTER comes down the steps, whistling gaily and rubbing his hands

TROTTER What a lovely smell of bacon!

MASON Yes, sir I reckon there's enough smell of bacon in 'ere to last for dinner

TROTTER Well, there's nothing like a good fat bacon rasher when you're as empty as I am

MASON I'm glad you like it fat, sir

TROTTER Well, I like a bit o' lean, too

MASON There was a bit of lean in the middle of yours, sir, but it's kind of shrunk up in the cooking

TROTTER Bad cooking, that's all Any porridge?

MASON Oh, yes, sir There's porridge

TROTTER Lumpy, I s'pose?

MASON Yes, sir Quite nice and lumpy

TROTTER Well, take all the lumps out o' mine

MASON And just bring you the gravy, sir? Very good, sir

[MASON goes out TROTTER looks after him suspiciously]

TROTTER You know, that man's getting familiar

OSBORNE He's not a bad cook

[TROTTER has picked up his coffee mug, and is smelling it]

TROTTER I say, d'you realize he's washed out his dish-cloth?

OSBORNE I know I told him about it

TROTTER Did you really? You've got some pluck 'Ow did you go about it?

OSBORNE I wrote and asked my wife for a packet of Lux Then I gave it to Mason and suggested he try it on something

TROTTER Good man No, he's not a bad cook Might be a lot worse When I was in the ranks we 'ad a prize cook—used to be a plumber before the war Ought to 'ave seen the stew 'e made Thin! Thin wasn't the word Put a bucketful of 'is stew in a bath and pull the plug, and the whole lot would go down in a couple of gurgles

[MASON brings TROTTER'S porridge]

MASON I've took the lumps out

TROTTER Good Keep 'em and use 'em for dumplings next time we 'ave boiled beef

MASON Very good, sir [He goes out]

TROTTER Yes That plumber was a prize cook, 'e was Lucky for us one day 'e set 'imself on fire making the tea 'E went 'ome pretty well fried Did Mason get that pepper?

OSBORNE Yes

TROTTER Good Must 'ave pepper

OSBORNE I thought you were on duty now

TROTTER I'm supposed to be Stanhope sent me down to get my breakfast He's looking after things till I finish

OSBORNE—He's got a long job then

TROTTER Oh, no I'm a quick eater Hi! Mason! Bacon!

MASON [outside] Coming, sir!

OSBORNE It's a wonderful morning

TROTTER Isn't it lovely? Makes you feel sort of young and 'opeful I was up in that old trench under the brick wall just now, and damned if a bloomin' little bird didn't start singing! Didn't 'arf sound funny Sign of spring, I s'pose [MASON arrives with TROTTER'S bacon] That looks all right

MASON If you look down straight on it from above, you can see a bit o' lean quite clear

TROTTER Good Lord, yes! That's it, isn't it?

MASON No, sir, that's a bit o' rust off the pan

TROTTER Ah! That's it, then!

MASON You've got it, sir

[He goes out]

TROTTER Cut us a chunk of bread, Uncle

[OSBORNE cuts him off a chunk]

OSBORNE How are things going up there?

TROTTER I don't like the look of things a bit

OSBORNE You mean—the quiet?

TROTTER Yes Standing up there in the dark last night there didn't seem a thing in the world alive—except the rats squeaking and my stomach grumbling about that cutlet

OSBORNE It's quiet even now

TROTTER Too damn quiet You can bet your boots the Boche is up to something The big attack soon, I reckon I don't like it, Uncle Pass the jam

OSBORNE It's strawberry

TROTTER Is it? I'm glad we got rid o' that raspberry jam Can't stand raspberry jam Pips get be'ind your plate

OSBORNE Did Stanhope tell you he wants two wiring parties out to-night?

TROTTER Yes He's fixing it up now [*He pauses, and goes on in a low voice*]

My goodness, Uncle, doesn't he look ill!

OSBORNE I'm afraid he's not well

TROTTER Nobody'd be well who went on like he does [*There is another pause*] You know when you came up to relieve me last night?

OSBORNE Yes?

TROTTER Well, Raleigh and me came back here, and there was Stanhope sitting on that bed drinking a whisky He looked as white as a sheet God, he looked awful, he'd drunk a bottle since dinner I said "Uilo!" and he didn't seem to know who I was Uncanny, wasn't it, Raleigh?

RALEIGH [*with lowered head*] Yes

TROTTER He just said, "Better go to bed, Raleigh"—just as if Raleigh'd been a school kid

OSBORNE Did he? [*There is a pause*] Look at the sun It'll be quite warm soon

[*They look at the pale square of sunlight on the floor*]

TROTTER It's warm now You can feel it on your face outside if you stand in it First time this year 'Ope we 'ave an 'ot summer

OSBORNE So do I

TROTTER Funny about that bird Made me feel quite braced up Sort of made me think about my garden of an evening—walking round in me slippers after supper, smoking me pipe

OSBORNE, You keen on gardening?

TROTTER Oh, I used to do a bit of an evening I 'ad a decent little grass plot in front, with flower-borders—geraniums, lobelia, and calsaluria—you know, red,

white, and blue Looked rather nice in the summer

OSBORNE Yes

TROTTER 'Ad some fine 'olly'ocks out the back One year I 'd one eight feet 'igh Took a photer of it [*He fumbles in his pocket case*] Like to look at it?

OSBORNE I would [*He looks at the photo*] By Jove, it's a beauty

TROTTER [*looking over OSBORNE'S shoulder*] You see that, just there?

OSBORNE Yes?

TROTTER That's the roof of the summer-'ouse

OSBORNE Is it really!

TROTTER Just shows the 'ite of the 'olly'ock

OSBORNE It does [*He shows the photo to RALEIGH*] A beauty, isn't it?

RALEIGH Rather!

TROTTER It never wanted no stick to keep it straight, neether [*There is a pause*] You keen on gardening?

OSBORNE Yes A bit I made a rockery when I was home on leave I used to cycle out to the woods and get primroses and things like that, and try and get 'em to grow in my garden

TROTTER I don't suppose they would!

OSBORNE They would if you pressed a bit of moss round them—

TROTTER —to make 'em feel at 'ome, eh? [*He laughs*]

OSBORNE They'll be coming out again soon if they've got this sun at home

TROTTER I reckon they will I remember one morning last spring—we was coming out of the salient Just when it was getting light in the morning—it was at the time when the Boche was sending over a lot of that gas that smells like pear-drops, you know?

OSBORNE I know Phosgene

TROTTER That's it We were scared to hell of it All of a sudden we smelt that funny sweet smell, and a fellow shouted "Gas!"—and we put on our masks, and then I spotted what it was

OSBORNE What was it?

TROTTER Why, a blinkin' may-tree! All out in bloom, growing beside the path! We did feel a lot of silly poops—putting on gas masks because of a damn may-tree! [*He stretches himself and tries to button his tunic*] Lord! I must get my fat down [*He gets up*] Well, I better go and relieve Stanhope He'll curse like hell if I don't I bet he's got a red-hot liver this morning

OSBORNE I relieve you at eleven

TROTTER That's right I don't like

this time of day in the line The old Boche 'as just 'ad 'is breakfast, and sends over a few whizz-bangs and rifle grenades to show 'e ain't forgotten us Still, I'd rather 'ave a bang or two than this damn quiet [*He puts on his helmet and gas mask satchel and goes up the steps*] Cheero!

OSBORNE Cheero!

RALEIGH Cheero!

OSBORNE [*to RALEIGH*] I expect Stanhope'll let you go on duty alone now

RALEIGH Will he? About what time?

OSBORNE Well, after me, I expect From about two till four

RALEIGH I see

[*There is a pause Then OSBORNE looks at RALEIGH and laughs*]

OSBORNE What do you think about it all?

RALEIGH Oh, all right, thanks [*He laughs*] I feel I've been here ages

OSBORNE [*filling his pipe*] I expect you do The time passes, though

RALEIGH Are we here for six days?

OSBORNE Yes Seems a long time, doesn't it?

RALEIGH [*laughing shortly*] It does rather I can't imagine—the end of six days here—

OSBORNE Anyway, we've done twelve hours already It's fine when you are relieved and go down the line to billets, and have a good hot bath, and sit and read under trees

RALEIGH Good Lord, I feel I haven't seen a tree for ages—not a real tree with leaves and branches—and yet I've only been here twelve hours

OSBORNE How did you feel—in the front line?

RALEIGH Oh, all right It seemed so frightfully quiet and uncanny—everybody creeping about and talking in low voices I suppose you've got to talk quietly when you're so near the German front line—only about seventy yards, isn't it?

OSBORNE Yes About the breadth of a football field

RALEIGH It's funny to think of it like that

OSBORNE I always measure distances like that out here Keeps them in proportion

RALEIGH Did you play football?

OSBORNE Yes But mostly reffing at school in the last few years

RALEIGH Are you a schoolmaster, then?

OSBORNE Yes I must apologize

RALEIGH Oh, I don't mind school-

masters [*Hastily*] I—I mean, I never met one outside a school

OSBORNE They do get out sometimes

RALEIGH [*laughing*] Who did you play for?

OSBORNE The Harlequins

RALEIGH I say, really!

OSBORNE I played for the English team on one great occasion

RALEIGH What! For *England*!

OSBORNE I was awfully lucky to get the chance It's a long time ago now

RALEIGH [*with awe*] Oh, but, good Lord! that must have been simply topping Where d'd you play?

OSBORNE Wing three

RALEIGH I say, I—I never realized—you'd played for England?

OSBORNE Tuppence to talk to me now! Anyhow, don't breeze it about

RALEIGH Don't the others know?

OSBORNE We never talk about football

RALEIGH They ought to know It'd make them feel jolly bucked

OSBORNE [*laughing*] It doesn't make much difference out here!

RALEIGH It must be awfully thrilling, playing in front of a huge crowd—all shouting and cheering—

OSBORNE You don't notice it when the game begins

RALEIGH You're too taken up with the game?

OSBORNE Yes

RALEIGH I used to get wind up playing at school with only a few kids looking on

OSBORNE You feel it more when there are only a few [*He has picked up a slip of paper from the table, suddenly he laughs*] Look at this!

RALEIGH [*looking curiously at it*] What is it?

OSBORNE Trotter's plan to make the time pass quickly One hundred and forty-four little circles—one for each hour of six days He's blacked in six already He's six hours behind

RALEIGH It's rather a good idea I like Trotter

OSBORNE He's a good chap

RALEIGH He makes things feel—natural

OSBORNE He's a genuine sort of chap

RALEIGH That's it He's genuine [*There is a pause He has been filling a new pipe OSBORNE is puffing at his old one*] How topping—to have played for England!

OSBORNE It was rather fun

[*There is a pause*]

RALEIGH The Germans are really quite decent, aren't they? I mean, outside the newspapers?

OSBORNE Yes [*Pause*] I remember up at Wipers we had a man shot when he was out on patrol just at dawn. We couldn't get him in that night. He lay out there groaning all day. Next night three of our men crawled out to get him in. It was so near the German trenches that they could have shot our fellows one by one. But, when our men began dragging the wounded man back over the rough ground, a big German officer stood up in their trenches and called out "Carry him!"—and our fellows stood up and carried the man back, and the German officer fired some lights for them to see by.

RALEIGH How topping!

OSBORNE Next day we blew each other's trenches to blazes.

RALEIGH It all seems rather—silly, doesn't it?

OSBORNE It does, rather.

[*There is silence for a while*]

RALEIGH I started a letter when I came off duty last night. How do we send letters?

OSBORNE The quartermaster-sergeant takes them down after he brings rations up in the evenings.

[*STANHOPE is coming slowly down the steps. RALEIGH rises*]

RALEIGH I think I'll go and finish it now—if I go on duty soon.

OSBORNE Come and write in here. It's more cheery.

RALEIGH It's all right, thanks, I'm quite comfortable in there. I've rigged up a sort of little table beside my bed.

OSBORNE Righto.

[*RALEIGH goes into his dug-out. STANHOPE is slowly taking off his equipment*]

STANHOPE What a foul smell of bacon.

OSBORNE Yes. We've got bacon for breakfast.

STANHOPE So I gather. Have you told Raleigh about rifle inspection?

OSBORNE No.

STANHOPE [*at the entrance to RALEIGH'S dug-out*] Raleigh!

RALEIGH [*appearing*] Yes?

STANHOPE You inspect your platoon's rifles at nine o'clock.

RALEIGH Oh, righto, Stanhope.

[*He goes again*]

STANHOPE [*sitting at the table*] I've

arranged two wiring parties to begin at eight o'clock to-night—Corporal Burt with two men and Sergeant Smith with two. I want them to strengthen the wire all along the front.

OSBORNE It's very weak at present. STANHOPE Every company leaves it for the next one to do. There're great holes blown out weeks ago.

OSBORNE I know.

STANHOPE Next night we'll start putting a belt of wire down both sides of us. OSBORNE Down the sides?

STANHOPE Yes. We'll wire ourselves right in. If this attack comes, I'm not going to trust the companies on our sides to hold their ground.

[*MASON has come in, and stands diffidently in the background*]

MASON Would you like a nice bit o' bacon, sir?

STANHOPE No thanks. I'll have a cup of tea.

MASON Right, sir.

[*He goes out*]

STANHOPE I've been having a good look round. We've got a strong position here—if we wire ourselves right in. The colonel's been talking to me up there.

OSBORNE Oh. Has he been round?

STANHOPE Yes. He says a German prisoner gave the day of attack as the 21st.

OSBORNE That's Thursday?

STANHOPE Yes. To-day's Tuesday.

OSBORNE That means about dawn the day after to-morrow.

STANHOPE The second dawn from now.

[*There is a pause*]

OSBORNE Then it'll come while we're here.

STANHOPE Yes. It'll come while we're here. And we shall be in the front seats.

OSBORNE Oh, well—

[*In the silence that follows, MASON enters with a cup of tea*]

MASON Would you like a nice plate of sardines, sir?

STANHOPE I should loathe it.

MASON Very good, sir.

[*He goes out*]

OSBORNE Did the colonel have much to say?

STANHOPE Only that when the attack comes we can't expect any help from behind. We're not to move from here. We've got to stick it.

OSBORNE I see.

STANHOPE We'll wire ourselves in as strongly as possible. I've got to arrange

battle positions for each platoon and section this afternoon

OSBORNE Well, I'm glad it's coming at last I'm sick of waiting

STANHOPE [*looking at TROTTER'S chart*] What's this extraordinary affair?

OSBORNE Trotter's plan to make the time pass by A hundred and forty-four circles—one for each hour of the six days

STANHOPE How many hours are there till dawn on the 21st?

OSBORNE Goodness knows Not many, I hope

STANHOPE Nearly nine o'clock now Twenty-four till nine to-morrow, twelve till nine at night—that's thirty-six, nine till six next morning, that's forty-five altogether

[*He begins to count off forty-five circles on TROTTER'S chart*]

OSBORNE What are you going to do?

STANHOPE At the end of the forty-fifth circle I'm going to draw a picture of Trotter being blown up in four pieces

OSBORNE Don't spoil his chart It took him an hour to make that

STANHOPE He won't see the point He's no imagination

OSBORNE I don't suppose he has

STANHOPE Funny not to have any imagination Must be rather nice

OSBORNE A bit dull, I should think

STANHOPE It must be, rather I suppose all his life Trotter feels like you and I do when we're drowsily drunk

OSBORNE Poor chap!

STANHOPE I suppose if Trotter looks at that wall he just sees a brown surface He doesn't see into the earth beyond—the worms wandering about round the stones and roots of trees I wonder how a worm knows when it's going up or down

OSBORNE When it's going down I suppose the blood runs into its head and makes it throb

STANHOPE Worms haven't got any blood

OSBORNE Then I don't suppose it ever does know

STANHOPE Rotten if it didn't—and went on going down when it thought it was coming up

OSBORNE Yes, I expect that's the one thing worms dread

STANHOPE D'you think this life sharpens the imagination?

OSBORNE It mus.

STANHOPE Whenever I look at anything nowadays I see right through it Looking at you now there's your uniform

—your jersey—shirt—vest—then beyond that—

OSBORNE Let's talk about something else—croquet, or the war

STANHOPE [*laughing*] Sorry! It's a habit that's grown on me lately—to look right through things, and on and on—till I get frightened and stop

OSBORNE I suppose everybody out here—*feels* more keenly

STANHOPE I hope so I wondered if there was anything wrong with me D'you ever get a sudden feeling that everything's going farther and farther away—till you're the only thing in the world—and then the world begins going away—until you're the only thing in—the universe—and you struggle to get back—and can't?

OSBORNE Bit of nerve strain, that's all

STANHOPE You don't think I'm going potty?

OSBORNE Oh, Lord, no!

STANHOPE [*throwing back his head and laughing*] Dear old Uncle! you don't really know, do you? You just pretend you do, to make me feel all right

OSBORNE When people are going potty they never talk about it, they keep it to themselves

STANHOPE Oh, well, that's all right, then [*There is silence for a while*] I had that feeling this morning, standing out there in the line while the sun was rising By the way, did you see the sunrise? Wasn't it gorgeous?

OSBORNE Splendid—this morning

STANHOPE I was looking across at the Boche trenches and right beyond—not a sound or a soul, just an enormous plain, all churned up like a sea that's got muddier and muddier till it's so stiff that it can't move You could have heard a pin drop in the quiet, yet you knew thousands of guns were hidden there, all ready, cleaned and oiled—millions of bullets lying in pouches—thousands of Germans, waiting and thinking Then, gradually, that feeling came—

OSBORNE I never knew the sun could rise in so many ways till I came out here Green, and pink, and red, and blue, and gray Extraordinary, isn't it?

STANHOPE Yes Hi! Mason!

MASON [*outside*] Yessir!

STANHOPE Bring some mugs and a bottle of whisky

MASON Yessir

OSBORNE [*smiling*] So early in the morning?

STANHOPE Just a spot It's damned cold in here

OSBORNE [*turning over the pages of a magazine*] This show at the Hippodrome has been running a long time

STANHOPE What? Zig-zag?

OSBORNE Yes George Robey's in it

STANHOPE Harper saw it on leave Says it's damn good Robey's pricelessly funny

[*MASON brings whisky and mugs and water*]

OSBORNE Wish I'd seen a show on leave

STANHOPE D'you mean to say you didn't go to any shows?

OSBORNE [*laughing*] No I spent all the time in the garden, making a rockery In the evenings I used to sit and smoke and read—and my wife used to knit socks and play the piano a bit We pretended there wasn't any war at all—till my two youngsters made me help in a tin-soldier battle on the floor

STANHOPE Poor old Uncle! You can't get away from it, can you?

OSBORNE I wish I knew how to fight a battle like those boys of mine You ought to have seen the way they lured my men under the sofa and mowed them down

STANHOPE [*laughing and helping himself to a drink*] You going to have one?

OSBORNE Not now, thanks

STANHOPE You go on duty at eleven, don't you?

OSBORNE Yes I relieve Trotter

STANHOPE Raleigh better go on at one o'clock and stay with you for an hour Then he can stay on alone till four Hibbert relieves him at four

OSBORNE Righto

STANHOPE What's Raleigh doing now?

OSBORNE Finishing a letter

STANHOPE Did you tell him?

OSBORNE About what?

STANHOPE Censorship

OSBORNE You don't mean that seriously?

STANHOPE Mean it? Of course I mean it

OSBORNE You can't do that

STANHOPE Officially I'm supposed to read all your letters Damn it all, Uncle! Imagine yourself in my place—a letter going away from here—from that boy—

OSBORNE He'll say nothing—rotten—about you

STANHOPE You think so? [*There is*

a pause] I heard you go on duty last night After you'd gone, I got up I was feeling bad I forgot Raleigh was out there with Trotter I'd forgotten all about him I was sleepy I just knew something beastly had happened Then he came in with Trotter—and looked at me After coming in out of the night air, this place must have reeked of candle-grease, and rats—and whisky One thing a boy like that can't stand is a smell that isn't fresh He looked at me as if I'd hit him between the eyes—as if I'd spat on him—

OSBORNE You imagine things

STANHOPE [*laughing*] Imagine things! No need to imagine!

OSBORNE Why can't you treat him like any other youngster?

[*RALEIGH comes in from his dug-out with a letter in his hand He stops short as he notices the abrupt silence that follows his entry*]

RALEIGH I'm sorry

OSBORNE It's all right, Raleigh Go on to inspect rifles?

RALEIGH Yes

OSBORNE You needn't bother if the wood's a bit dirty—just the barrels and magazines and all the metal parts

RALEIGH Righto

OSBORNE See there's plenty of oil on it And look at the ammunition in the men's pouches

RALEIGH Right [*He crosses towards the door and turns*] Where do we put the letters to be collected?

OSBORNE Oh, just on the table

RALEIGH Thanks

[*He begins to lick the flap of the envelope*]

STANHOPE [*in a quiet voice*] You leave it open

RALEIGH [*surprised*] Open?

STANHOPE Yes I have to censor all letters

RALEIGH [*stammering*] Oh, but—I haven't said anything about—where we are—

STANHOPE It's the rule that letters must be read

RALEIGH [*nervously*] Oh, I—I didn't realize that [*He stands embarrassed, then gives a short laugh*] I—I think—I'll just leave it, then

[*He unbuttons his tunic pocket to put the letter away STANHOPE rises, crosses slowly and faces RALEIGH*]

STANHOPE Gave me that letter!

RALEIGH [*astonished*] But—Den-

NIS—

STANHOPE [*trembling*] Give me that letter!

RALEIGH But it's—it's private I didn't know—

STANHOPE D'you understand an order? Give me that letter!

RALEIGH But I tell you—there's nothing— [STANHOPE *clutches RALEIGH'S wrist and tears the letter from his hand*] Dennis—I'm—

STANHOPE Don't "Dennis" me! Stanhope's my name! You're not at school! Go and inspect your rifles

[*RALEIGH stands in amazement at the foot of the steps*]

STANHOPE [*shouting*] D'you understand an order?

[*For a moment RALEIGH stares wide-eyed at STANHOPE, who is trembling and breathing heavily, then almost in a whisper he says "Right," and goes quietly up the narrow steps*]

STANHOPE *turns toward the table*

OSBORNE Good heavens, Stanhope!

STANHOPE [*wheeling furiously on OSBORNE*] Look here, Osborne, I'm commanding this company I ask for advice when I want it!

OSBORNE Very well

[STANHOPE *sinks down at the table with the letter in his hand* There is silence for a moment Then he throws the letter on the table and rests his head between his hands]

STANHOPE Oh, God! I don't want to read the blasted thing!

OSBORNE You'll let it go then?

STANHOPE I don't care

[*There is a pause*]

OSBORNE Shall I glance through it—for you?

STANHOPE If you like

OSBORNE I don't want to

STANHOPE You better I can't

[OSBORNE *takes the letter from the table and opens it* STANHOPE *sits with his head in his hand, digging a magazine with a pencil* After a while, OSBORNE *glances up at STANHOPE*]

OSBORNE D'you want to hear?

STANHOPE I suppose I better know

OSBORNE He begins with a description of his getting here—he doesn't mention the names of any places

STANHOPE What does he say then?

OSBORNE The last piece is about you

STANHOPE Go on

OSBORNE [*reading*] He says "And now I come to the great news I reported at Battalion Headquarters and the colonel

looked in a little book, and said, 'You report to "C" Company—Captain Stanhope' Can't you imagine what I felt? I was taken along some trenches and shown a dug-out There was an awfully nice officer there—quite old—with gray hair"—[OSBORNE *clears his throat*]—"and then later Dennis came in He looked tired, but that's because he works so frightfully hard, and because of the responsibility Then I went on duty in the front line, and a sergeant told me all about Dennis He said that Dennis is the finest officer in the battalion, and the men simply love him He hardly ever sleeps in the dug-out, he's always up in the front line with the men, cheering them on with jokes, and making them keen about things, like he did the kids at school I'm awfully proud to think he's my friend" [There is silence STANHOPE *has not moved while OSBORNE has read*] That's all [Pause] Shall I stick it down?

[STANHOPE *sits with lowered head* He *murmurs something that sounds like "Yes, please"* He rises heavily and crosses to the shadows by OSBORNE'S bed The sun is shining quite brightly in the trench outside]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II—Afternoon on the same day The sunlight has gone from the dug-out floor, but still shines brightly in the trench

STANHOPE is lying on his bed reading by the light of a candle on the table beside him A burly FIGURE comes groping down the steps and stands blinking in the shadows of the dug-out A huge man, with a heavy black mustache, a fat red face, and massive chin

STANHOPE *puts the magazine down, rises and sits up to the table*

STANHOPE I want to talk with you, sergeant-major

S-M [*standing stolidly by the steps*] Yes, sir?

STANHOPE Sit down Have a whisky?

S-M [*a suspicion of brightness in his voice*] Thank you, sir

[The SERGEANT-MAJOR *diffidently takes a small tot*]

STANHOPE I say You won't taste that Take a proper one

S-M Well—sir [STANHOPE *reaches over, helps the SERGEANT-MAJOR to a large tot, and takes one himself*] Turning

chilly again, sir Quite warm this morning

STANHOPE Yes

S-M Well, here's your very good health,
sir [*He raises his glass and drinks*]

STANHOPE Cheero [*He puts down his glass and abruptly changes his tone*]
Now, look here, sergeant-major We must expect this attack on Thursday morning at dawn That's the second dawn from now

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR takes a very dirty little notebook from his pocket and jots down notes with a very small stub of a pencil*]

S-M Thursday morning Very good,
sir

STANHOPE We're to hold these trenches, and no man's to move from here

S-M Very good, sir

STANHOPE It may happen that companies on our sides will give way, leaving our flanks exposed, so I want a screen of wire in the support line

S-M [*writing hurriedly*] Both flanks—yes, sir

STANHOPE When the attack begins, I shall take charge of the left, and Mr Osborne the right You will be with Mr Osborne, and Sergeant Baker with me, 9 and 10 Platoons will move over here [*He points out the position on the trench map*] 11 and 12 Platoons to the left

S-M I see, sir

STANHOPE Is there anything you're not clear about?

S-M [*looking at his notes*] Seems all clear, sir

STANHOPE Anything you want to know?

S-M Well, sir [*clears his throat*—when the attack comes, of course, we beat 'em off—but what if they keep on attacking?

STANHOPE Then we keep on beating them off

S-M Yes, sir But what I mean is—they're bound to make a big thing of it

STANHOPE [*cheerily*] Oh, I think they will!

S-M Well, then, sir If they don't get through the first day they'll attack the next day and the next—

STANHOPE They're bound to

S-M Then oughtn't we to fix up something about, well [*he gropes for the right words*—er—falling back?

STANHOPE There's no need to—you see, this company's a lot better than "A" and "B" Companies on either side of us

S-M Quite, sir

STANHOPE Well, then, if anyone breaks "A" and "B" will break before we do As long as we stick here when the other companies have given way, we can fire into the Boche as they try and get through the gaps on our sides—we'll make a hell of a mess of them We might delay the advance a whole day

S-M [*diffidently*] Yes, sir, but what 'appens when the Boche 'as all got round the back of us?

STANHOPE Then we advance and win the war

S-M [*pretending to make a note*] Win the war Very good, sir

STANHOPE But you understand exactly what I mean, sergeant-major Our orders are to stick here If you're told to stick where you are you don't make plans to retire

S-M Quite, sir

[*OSBORNE'S voice is calling down the steps SERGEANT-MAJOR rises*]

OSBORNE Are you there, Stanhope?

STANHOPE [*rising quickly*] Yes What's the matter?

OSBORNE The colonel's up here Wants to see you—

STANHOPE Oh, right, I'll come up

COLONEL [*from above*] All right, Stanhope—I'll come down

S-M [*who has risen*] Anything more, sir?

STANHOPE I don't think so I'll see you at stand to this evening

S-M Very good, sir

[*He stands back a pace and salutes STANHOPE smartly STANHOPE'S eye falls on the SERGEANT-MAJOR'S nearly finished drink on the table He points to it*]

STANHOPE Hoy! What about that?

S-M Thank you, sir

[*He finishes the drink The COLONEL comes down the steps*]

COLONEL Good morning, sergeant-major

S-M Good morning, sir

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR goes up the steps*]

STANHOPE Hullo, sir!

COLONEL Hullo, Stanhope! [*He sniffs*] Strong smell of bacon

STANHOPE Yes, sir We had some bacon for breakfast

COLONEL Hangs about, doesn't it?

STANHOPE Yes, sir Clings to the walls

COLONEL Lovely day

STANHOPE Splendid, sir

COLONEL Spring's coming [*There is*

a pause] I'm glad you're alone I've got some rather serious news

STANHOPE I'm sorry to hear that, sir Will you have a drink?

COLONEL Well, thanks—just a spot [STANHOPE mixes a drink for the COLONEL and himself] Here's luck

STANHOPE Cheero, sir [Bringing forward a box] Sit down, sir

COLONEL Thanks

STANHOPE What's the news, sir?

COLONEL The brigadier came to see me this morning [*He pauses*] It seems almost certain the attack's to come on Thursday morning They've got information from more than one source—but they don't know where it's going to fall the hardest The Boche began relieving his front-line troops yesterday They're bound to put in certain regiments where they intend to make the hardest push—

STANHOPE Naturally—

COLONEL And the general wants us to make a raid to find out who's come into the line opposite here

[*There is a pause*]

STANHOPE I see When?

COLONEL As soon as possible He said to-night

STANHOPE Oh, but that's absurd!

COLONEL I told him so I said the earliest would be to-morrow afternoon A surprise daylight raid under a smoke screen from the trench-mortar people I think daylight best There's not much moon now, and it's vitally important to get hold of a Boche or two

STANHOPE Quite

COLONEL I suggest sending two officers and ten men Quite enough for the purpose Just opposite here there's only seventy yards of No Man's Land To-night the trench-mortars can blow a hole in the Boche wire and you can cut a hole in yours Harrison of the trench-mortars is coming in to dinner with me this evening to discuss everything I'd like you to come too Eight o'clock suit you?

STANHOPE Very good, sir

COLONEL I'll leave you to select the men

STANHOPE You want me to go with them, sir?

COLONEL Oh, no, Stanhope I—I can't let you go No I want one officer to direct the raid and one to make the dash in and collar some Boche

STANHOPE Who do you suggest, sir?

COLONEL Well, I suggest Osborne, for one He's a very level-headed chap He can direct it

STANHOPE And who else?

COLONEL Well, there's Trotter—but he's a bit fat, isn't he? Not much good at dashing in?

STANHOPE No D'you suggest Hibbert?

COLONEL Well, what do you think of Hibbert?

STANHOPE I don't think so

COLONEL No [*There is a pause*]

STANHOPE Why not send a good sergeant, sir?

COLONEL No I don't think a sergeant The men expect officers to lead a raid

STANHOPE Yes There is that

COLONEL As a matter of fact, Stanhope, I'm thinking of that youngster I sent up to you last night

STANHOPE Raleigh?

COLONEL Yes Just the type Plenty of guts—

STANHOPE He's awfully new to it all—

COLONEL All to the good His nerves are sound

STANHOPE It's rotten to send a fellow who's only just arrived

COLONEL Well, who else is there? I could send an officer from another company—

STANHOPE [*quickly*] Oh, Lord, no We'll do it

COLONEL Then I suggest Osborne to lead the raid and Raleigh to make the dash—with ten good men We'll meet Harrison at supper and arrange the smoke bombs—and blowing a hole in the wire You select the men and talk to Osborne and Raleigh about it in the meantime

STANHOPE Very well, sir

COLONEL Better send Osborne and Raleigh down to me in the morning to talk things over Or, better still—I'll come up here first thing to-morrow morning

STANHOPE Right, sir

COLONEL It's all a damn nuisance, but, after all—it's necessary

STANHOPE I suppose it is

COLONEL Well, so long, Stanhope I'll see you at eight o'clock Do you like fish?

STANHOPE Fish, sir?

COLONEL Yes We've had some fresh fish sent up from railhead for supper to-night

STANHOPE Splendid, sir!

COLONEL Whiting, I think it is

STANHOPE Good!

COLONEL Well, bye-bye

[*The COLONEL goes up the steps*
STANHOPE stands watching for a

moment, then turns and walks slowly to the table HIBBERT comes quietly into the dug-out from the tunnel leading from his sleeping quarters]

STANHOPE Hullo! I thought you were asleep

HIBBERT I just wanted a word with you, Stanhope

STANHOPE Fire away

HIBBERT This neuralgia of mine I'm awfully sorry I'm afraid I can't stick it any longer—

STANHOPE I know It's rotten, isn't it? I've got it like hell—

HIBBERT [*taken aback*] You have?

STANHOPE Had it for weeks

HIBBERT Well, I'm sorry, Stanhope It's no good I've tried damned hard, but I must go down—

STANHOPE Go down—where?

HIBBERT Why, go sick—go down the line I must go into hospital and have some kind of treatment [*There is a silence for a moment STANHOPE is looking at HIBBERT—till HIBBERT turns away and walks towards his dug-out*] I'll go right along now, I think

STANHOPE [*quietly*] You're going to stay here

HIBBERT I'm going down to see the doctor He'll send me to hospital when he understands—

STANHOPE I've seen the doctor I saw him this morning He won't send you to hospital, Hibbert, he'll send you back here He promised me he would [*There is silence*] So you can save yourself a walk

HIBBERT [*fiercely*] What the hell—!

STANHOPE Stop that!

HIBBERT I've a perfect right to go sick if I want to The men can—why can't an officer?

STANHOPE No man's sent down unless he's very ill There's nothing wrong with you, Hibbert The German attack's on Thursday, almost for certain You're going to stay here and see it through with the rest of us

HIBBERT [*hysterically*] I tell you, I can't—the pain's nearly sending me mad I'm going! I've got all my stuff packed I'm going now—you can't stop me!

[*He goes excitedly into the dug-out STANHOPE walks slowly towards the steps, turns, and undoes the flap of his revolver holster He takes out his revolver, and stands casually examining it HIBBERT returns with his pack slung on his back and a walk-*

ing-stick in his hand He pauses at the sight of STANHOPE by the steps]

HIBBERT Let's get by, Stanhope

STANHOPE You're going to stay here and do your job

HIBBERT Haven't I told you? I can't! Don't you understand? Let—let me get by

STANHOPE Now look here, Hibbert I've got a lot of work to do and no time to waste Once and for all, you're going to stay here and see it through with the rest of us

HIBBERT I shall die of this pain if I don't go!

STANHOPE Better die of pain than be shot for deserting

HIBBERT [*in a low voice*] What do you mean?

STANHOPE You know what I mean—

HIBBERT I've a right to see the doctor!

STANHOPE Good God! Don't you understand!—he'll send you back here Doctor Preston's never let a shirker pass him yet—and he's not going to start now—two days before the attack—

HIBBERT [*pleadingly*] Stanhope—if you only knew how awful I feel— Please do let me go by—

[*He walks slowly round behind STANHOPE STANHOPE turns and thrusts him roughly back With a lightning movement HIBBERT raises his stick and strikes blindly at STANHOPE, who catches the stick, tears it from HIBBERT'S hands, smashes it across his knee, and throws it on the ground*]

STANHOPE God!—you little swine You know what that means—don't you? Striking a superior officer! [*There is silence STANHOPE takes hold of his revolver as it swings from its lanyard HIBBERT stands quivering in front of STANHOPE*] Never mind, though I won't have you shot for that—

HIBBERT Let me go—

STANHOPE If you went, I'd have you shot—for deserting It's a hell of a disgrace—to die like that I'd rather spare you the disgrace I give you half a minute to think You either stay here and try and be a man—or you try to get out of that door—to desert If you do that, there's going to be an accident D'you understand? I'm fiddling with my revolver, d'you see?—cleaning it—and it's going off by accident It often happens out here It's going off, and it's going to shoot you between the eyes

HIBBERT [*in a whisper*] You daren't—

STANHOPE You don't deserve to be shot by accident—but I'd save you the disgrace of the other way—I give you half a minute to decide [*He holds up his wrist to look at his watch*] Half a minute from now—

[*There is silence, a few seconds go by Suddenly HIBBERT bursts into a high-pitched laugh*]

HIBBERT Go on, then, shoot! You won't let me go to the hospital I swear I'll never go into those trenches again Shoot!—and thank God—

STANHOPE [*with his eyes on his watch*] Fifteen more seconds—

HIBBERT Go on! I'm ready—

STANHOPE Ten [*He looks up at HIBBERT who has closed his eyes*] Five

[*Again STANHOPE looks up After a moment he quietly drops his revolver into its holster and steps towards HIBBERT, who stands with lowered head and eyes tightly screwed up, his arms stretched stiffly by his sides, his hands tightly clutching the edges of his tunic Gently STANHOPE places his hands on HIBBERT'S shoulders HIBBERT starts violently and gives a little cry He opens his eyes and stares vacantly into STANHOPE'S face STANHOPE is smiling*]

STANHOPE Good man, Hibbert I liked the way you stuck that

HIBBERT [*hoarsely*] Why didn't you shoot?

STANHOPE Stay here, old chap—and see it through—

[*HIBBERT stands trembling, trying to speak Suddenly he breaks down and cries STANHOPE takes his hands from his shoulders and turns away*]

HIBBERT Stanhope! I've tried like hell—I swear I have Ever since I came out here I've hated and loathed it Every sound up there makes me all—cold and sick I'm different to—the others—you don't understand It's got worse and worse, and now I can't bear it any longer I'll never go up those steps again—into the line—with the men looking at me—and knowing—I'd rather die here

[*He is sitting on STANHOPE'S bed, crying without an effort to restrain himself*]

STANHOPE [*pouring out a whisky*] Try a drop of this, old chap—

HIBBERT No, thanks

STANHOPE Go on Drink it [*HIB-*

BERT takes the mug and drinks STANHOPE sits down beside HIBBERT and puts an arm round his shoulder] I know what you feel, Hibbert I've known all along—

HIBBERT How can you know?

STANHOPE Because I feel the same—exactly the same! Every little noise up there makes me feel—just as you feel Why didn't you tell me instead of talking about neuralgia? We all feel like you do sometimes, if you only knew I hate and loathe it all Sometimes I feel I could just lie down on this bed and pretend I was paralyzed or something—and couldn't move—and just lie there till I died—or was dragged away

HIBBERT I can't bear to go up into those awful trenches again

STANHOPE When are you due to go on?

HIBBERT Quite soon At four

STANHOPE Shall we go on together? We know how we both feel now Shall we see if we can stick it together?

HIBBERT I can't—

STANHOPE Supposing I said I can't—supposing we all say we can't—what would happen then?

HIBBERT I don't care What does it matter? It's all so—so beastly—nothing matters—

STANHOPE Supposing the worst happened—supposing we were knocked right out Think of all the chaps who've gone already It can't be very lonely there—with all those fellows Sometimes I think it's lonelier here [*He pauses HIBBERT is sitting quietly now, his eyes roving vacantly in front of him*] Just go and have a quiet rest Then we'll go out together

HIBBERT Do please let me go, Stanhope—

STANHOPE If you went—and left Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men up there to do your work—could you ever look a man straight in the face again—in all your life? [*There is silence again*] You may be wounded Then you can go home and feel proud—and if you're killed, you—you won't have to stand this hell any more I might have fired just now If I had you would have been dead now But you're still alive—with a straight fighting chance of coming through Take the chance, old chap, and stand in with Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh Don't you think it worth standing in with men like that?—when you know they all feel like you do—in their hearts—and just go on sticking it because

they know it's—it's the only thing a decent man can do [*Again there is silence*] What about it?

HIBBERT I'll—I'll try—

STANHOPE Good man!

HIBBERT You—you won't say anything, Stanhope—about this?

STANHOPE If you promise not to tell any one what a blasted funk I am

HIBBERT [*with a little laugh*] No

STANHOPE Splendid! Now go and have ten minutes' rest and a smoke—then we'll go up together and hold each other's hands—and jump every time a rat squeaks [*HIBBERT rises and blows his nose*] We've all got a good fighting chance I mean to come through—don't you think?

HIBBERT Yes Rather [*He goes timidly towards his dug-out, and turns at the doorway*] It's awfully decent of you, Stanhope— [*STANHOPE is pouring himself out a whisky*] And thanks most awfully for—

STANHOPE That's all right

[*HIBBERT goes away* STANHOPE takes a drink and sits down at the table to write MASON comes in]

MASON Will you have a nice cup of tea, sir?

STANHOPE Can you guarantee it's nice?

MASON Well, sir—it's a bit oniony, but that's only because of the saucepan

STANHOPE In other words, it's onion soup with tea-leaves in it?

MASON Not till dinner-time, sir

STANHOPE All right, Mason Bring two cups of onion tea One for Mr Hibbert

MASON Very good, sir [*Going towards the door, he meets OSBORNE coming in*] Will you have a nice cup of tea, sir?

OSBORNE Please, Mason—and plenty of bread and butter and strawberry jam

MASON Very good, sir

STANHOPE Well, Uncle—how are things going on up there?

OSBORNE Two lonely rifle grenades came over just now

STANHOPE I heard them Where did they pitch?

OSBORNE Just over the front line on the left Otherwise nothing doing [*Pause*]

STANHOPE The colonel's been talking to me

OSBORNE About the attack?

STANHOPE Partly We've got to make a raid, Uncle

OSBORNE Oh? When?

STANHOPE To-morrow afternoon Un-

der a smoke screen Two officers and ten men

OSBORNE Who's going?

STANHOPE You and Raleigh

[*Pause*]

OSBORNE Oh! [*There is another pause*] Why Raleigh?

STANHOPE The colonel picked you to direct and Raleigh to dash in

OSBORNE I see

STANHOPE The brigade wants to know who's opposite here

OSBORNE To-morrow? What time?

STANHOPE I suggest about five o'clock A little before dusk—

OSBORNE I see

STANHOPE I'm damn sorry

OSBORNE That's all right, old chap

STANHOPE I'm dining with the colonel to arrange everything Then I'll come back and go through it with you

OSBORNE Where do we raid from?

STANHOPE Out of the sap on our left Straight across

OSBORNE Where's the map?

STANHOPE Here we are Look Straight across to this sentry post of the Boche Sixty yards To-night we'll lay out a guiding tape as far as possible After dark the torch-emas are going to break the Boche wire and we'll cut a passage in ours

OSBORNE Will you fix up the men who are to go?

STANHOPE Are you keen on any special men?

OSBORNE Can I take a corporal?

STANHOPE Sure

OSBORNE May I have young Crooks?

STANHOPE Righto

OSBORNE You'll ask for volunteers, I suppose?

STANHOPE Yes I'll see the sergeant-major and get him to go round for names

[*He crosses to the doorway as MASON comes in with the tea*]

MASON Your tea, sir!

STANHOPE Keep it hot, Mason

MASON Will you take this cup, Mr Osborne?

STANHOPE Take the other m to Mr Hibbert, in there

MASON Very good, sir

[*He goes in to HIBBERT'S dug-out*] STANHOPE Shan't be long, Uncle

[*He goes up the steps*]

OSBORNE Righto [*MASON returns*]

MASON Will you have cut bread and butter—or shall I bring the loaf, sir?

OSBORNE Cut it Mason, please

MASON Just bringing the jam separately?

OSBORNE Yes

MASON Very good, sir

[MASON goes out OSBORNE takes a small leather bound book from his pocket, opens it at a marker, and begins to read TROTTER appears from the sleeping dug-out looking very sleepy]

TROTTER Tea ready?

OSBORNE Yes

TROTTER Why's Hibbert got his tea in there?

OSBORNE I don't know

TROTTER [rubbing his eyes] Oh, Lord, I do feel frowsy 'Ad a fine sleep, though [MASON brings more tea and a pot of jam]

MASON Bread just coming, sir 'Ere's the strawberry jam, sir

TROTTER [reciting] "'Tell me, Mother, what is that

That looks like strawberry jam?"

'Hush, hush, my dear, 'tis only Pa

Run over by a tram——'"

OSBORNE The colonel came here while you were asleep

TROTTER Oh?

OSBORNE We've got to make a raid to-morrow afternoon

TROTTER Oh, Lord! What—all of us?

OSBORNE Two officers and ten men

TROTTER Who's got to do it?

OSBORNE Raleigh and I

TROTTER Raleigh!

OSBORNE Yes

TROTTER But 'e's only just come!

OSBORNE Apparently that's the reason

TROTTER And you're going too?

OSBORNE Yes

TROTTER Let's 'ear all about it

OSBORNE I know nothing yet Except that it's got to be done

TROTTER What a damn nuisance!

OSBORNE It is, rather

TROTTER I reckon the Boche are all ready waiting for it Did you 'ear about the raid just south of 'ere the other night?

OSBORNE Nothing much

TROTTER The trench-mortars go and knock an 'ole in the Boche wire to let our fellers through—and in the night the Boche went out and tied bits o' red rag on each side of the 'ole

OSBORNE Yes I heard about that

TROTTER And even then our fellers 'ad to make the raid It was murder Doesn't this tea taste of onions?

OSBORNE It does a bit

TROTTER Pity Mason don't clean 'is pots better [MASON brings some bread on a plate] This tea tastes of onions

MASON I'm sorry, sir Onions do 'ave such a way of cropping up again

TROTTER Yes, but we 'aven't 'ad onions for days!

MASON I know, sir That's what makes it so funny

TROTTER Well, you better do something about it

MASON I'll look into it, sir

[He goes out]
[OSBORNE and TROTTER prepare themselves slices of bread and jam]

TROTTER Joking apart It's damn ridiculous making a raid when the Boche are expecting it

OSBORNE We're not doing it for fun

TROTTER I know

OSBORNE You might avoid talking to Raleigh about it

TROTTER Why? How do you mean?

OSBORNE There's no need to tell him it's murder——

TROTTER Oh! Lord! no [He pauses] I'm sorry 'e's got to go 'E's a nice young feller— [OSBORNE turns to his book There is silence] What are you reading?

OSBORNE [wearily] Oh, just a book

TROTTER What's the title?

OSBORNE [showing him the cover] Ever read it?

TROTTER [leaning over and reading the cover] Alice's Adventures in Wonderland—why, that's a kid's book!

OSBORNE Yes

TROTTER You aren't reading it?

OSBORNE Yes

TROTTER What—a kid's book?

OSBORNE Haven't you read it?

TROTTER [scornfully] No!

OSBORNE You ought to [Reads]

"How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale?"

"How cheerfully he seems to grin
And neatly spread his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in
With gently smiling jaws!"

TROTTER [after a moment's thought] I don't see no point in that

OSBORNE [wearily] Exactly That's just the point

TROTTER [looking curiously at OSBORNE] You are a funny chap!

[STANHOPE returns]

STANHOPE The sergeant-major's getting volunteers

OSBORNE Good!

TROTTER Sorry to 'ear about the raid, skipper

STANHOPE [shortly] So am I What do you make the time?

TROTTER Just on four

[MASON brings in more tea]

STANHOPE [taking the mug of tea] Was Hibbert asleep when you came out of there?

TROTTER No 'E was just lying on 'is bed, smoking

STANHOPE [going to the sleeping dug-out] Hibbert!

HIBBERT [coming out] I'm ready, Stanhope

STANHOPE Had some tea?

HIBBERT Yes, thanks

TROTTER I reckon Raleigh'll be glad to be relieved Rotten being on dooty for the first time alone

OSBORNE I don't think he minds

STANHOPE I shall be up there some time, Uncle

OSBORNE I say, why don't you have a rest—you've been on the go all day

STANHOPE There's too much to do This raid's going to upset the arrangements of the wiring party to-night Can't have men out there while the toch-emas are blowing holes in the Boche wire [He drinks up his tea] Ready, Hibbert? Come on, my lad

[STANHOPE and HIBBERT leave the dug-out together TROTTER looks after them curiously, and turns to OSBORNE]

TROTTER Can't understand that little feller, can you?

OSBORNE Who?

TROTTER Why, 'Ibbert D'you see, 's eyes? All red 'E told me in there 'e'd got 'ay-fever

OSBORNE Rotten thing, hay-fever

TROTTER If you ask me, 'e's been crying—

[OSBORNE is writing at the table]

OSBORNE Maybe

TROTTER Funny little bloke, isn't 'e?

OSBORNE Yes I say—d'you mind? I just want to get a letter off

TROTTER Oh, sorry They 'aven't collected the letters yet, then?

OSBORNE Not yet

TROTTER I'll get one off to my old lady [He goes towards his dug-out] She's wrote and asked if I've got fleas

OSBORNE Have you?

TROTTER [gently rotating his shoulders] I wish it was fleas

[TROTTER goes into his dug-out, OSBORNE continues his letter RALEIGH comes down the steps from the trench]

RALEIGH [excitedly] I say, Stanhope's told me about the raid

OSBORNE Has he?

RALEIGH Just you and me, isn't it—and ten men?

OSBORNE Yes, to-morrow Just before dusk Under a smoke cloud

RALEIGH I say—it's most frightfully exciting!

OSBORNE We shall know more about it after Stanhope sees the colonel to-night

RALEIGH Were you and I picked—specially?

OSBORNE Yes

RALEIGH I—say!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

SCENE I—*The following day, towards sunset The earth wall of the trench outside glows with a light that slowly fades with the sinking sun*

STANHOPE is alone, wandering to and fro across the dug-out He looks up the steps for a moment, crosses to the table, and glances down at the map He looks anxiously at his watch, and, going to the servants' dug-out, calls

STANHOPE Mason!

MASON [outside] Yessir!

STANHOPE Are you making the coffee?

MASON Yessir!

STANHOPE Make it hot and strong Ready in five minutes I'll call when it's wanted

MASON Very good, sir

[Again STANHOPE wanders restlessly to and fro The COLONEL comes down the steps]

COLONEL Everything ready?

STANHOPE Yes, sir [There is silence] You've no news, then?

COLONEL I'm afraid not It's got to be done

STANHOPE [after a pause] I see

COLONEL The brigadier says the Boche did the same thing just south of here the other day

STANHOPE I know, but didn't you suggest we altered our plans and made a

surprise raid farther up the line after dark?

COLONEL Yes I suggested that

STANHOPE What did he say?

COLONEL He said the present arrangements have got to stand

STANHOPE But surely he must realize —

COLONEL [*Impatiently breaking in*] Look here, Stanhope, I've done all I can, but my report's got to be at headquarters by seven this evening. If we wait till it's dark we shall be too late.

STANHOPE Why seven?

COLONEL They've got some conference to arrange the placing of reserves.

STANHOPE They can't have it later because of dinner, I suppose.

COLONEL Lots of raids have taken place along the line to-day. With the attack to-morrow morning, headquarters naturally want all the information they can get as early as possible.

STANHOPE Meanwhile the Boche are sitting over there with a dozen machine-guns trained on that hole—waiting for our fellows to come.

COLONEL Well, I can't disobey orders.

STANHOPE Why didn't the trench-mortars blow a dozen holes in different places—so the Boche wouldn't know which we were going to use?

COLONEL It took three hours to blow that one. How could they blow a dozen in the time? It's no good worrying about that now. It's too late. Where's Osborne and Raleigh?

STANHOPE They're up in the sap, having a last look around. What d'you make the time, sir?

COLONEL Exactly nineteen minutes to

STANHOPE I'm thirty seconds behind you.

COLONEL Funny. We checked this morning.

STANHOPE Still, it's near enough. We shan't go till the smoke blows across.

COLONEL The smoke ought to blow across nicely. The wind's just right. I called on the trench-mortars on the way up. Everything's ready. They'll drop the bombs thirty yards to the right.

STANHOPE Are you going to stay here?

COLONEL I'll watch from the trench just above, I think. Bring the prisoners straight back here. We'll question them right away.

STANHOPE Why not take them straight down to your quarters?

COLONEL Well, the Boche are bound to shell pretty heavily. I don't want the risk of the prisoners being knocked out before we've talked to them.

STANHOPE All right. I'll have them brought back here.

[*There is a pause. The COLONEL sucks hard at his pipe. STANHOPE roves restlessly about, smoking a cigarette.*]

COLONEL It's no good getting depressed. After all, it's only sixty yards. The Boche'll be firing into a blank fog. Osborne's a cool, level-headed chap, and Raleigh's the very man to dash in. You've picked good men to follow them?

STANHOPE The best. All youngsters. Strong, keen chaps.

COLONEL Good. [*Another pause*] You know quite well I'd give anything to cancel the beastly affair.

STANHOPE I know you would, sir.

COLONEL Have these red rags on the wire upset the men at all?

STANHOPE It's hard to tell. They naturally take it as a joke. They say the rags are just what they want to show them the way through the gap.

COLONEL That's the spirit, Stanhope. [*OSBORNE and RALEIGH come down the steps*] Well, Osborne. Everything ready?

OSBORNE Yes, I think we're all ready, sir. I make it just a quarter to

COLONEL That's right.

OSBORNE The men are going to stand by at three minutes to

COLONEL The smoke bombs drop exactly on the hour. You'll give the word to go when the smoke's thick enough?

OSBORNE That's right, sir.

STANHOPE [*at the servants' dug-out*] Mason!

MASON Coming, sir!

STANHOPE Were the men having their rum, Uncle?

OSBORNE Yes. Just as we left. It gives it a quarter of an hour to soak in.

COLONEL That's right. Are they cheerful?

OSBORNE Yes. Quite.

[*MASON brings in two cups of coffee and puts them on the table.*]

STANHOPE Would you like to go up and speak to them, sir?

COLONEL Well, don't you think they'd rather be left alone?

STANHOPE I think they would appreciate a word or two.

COLONEL All right. If you think they would.

OSBORNE They're all in the center dug-out, sir

COLONEL Right You coming, Stanhope?

STANHOPE Yes I'll come, sir

[The COLONEL lingers a moment There is an awkward pause Then the COLONEL clears his throat and speaks]

COLONEL Well, good luck, Osborne I'm certain you'll put up a good show

OSBORNE *[taking the COLONEL'S hand]* Thank you, sir

COLONEL And, Raleigh, just go in like blazes Grab hold of the first Boche you see and bundle him across here One'll do, but bring more if you see any handy

RALEIGH *[taking the COLONEL'S offered hand]* Right, sir

COLONEL And, if you succeed, I'll recommend you both for the MC [OSBORNE and RALEIGH murmur their thanks] Remember, a great deal may depend on bringing in a German It may mean the winning of the whole war You never know *[Another pause]* Well, good luck to you both

[Again OSBORNE and RALEIGH murmur their thanks The COLONEL and STANHOPE go towards the door]

COLONEL *[over his shoulder]* Don't forget to empty your pockets of papers and things

RALEIGH Oh, no

[He goes into his dug-out, taking letters and papers from his pockets STANHOPE is about to follow the COLONEL up the steps when OSBORNE calls him back]

OSBORNE Er—Stanhope—just a moment

STANHOPE *[returning]* Hullo!

OSBORNE I say, don't think I'm being morbid, or anything like that, but would you mind taking these?

STANHOPE Sure Until you come back, old man

OSBORNE It's only just in case—*[He takes his watch and a letter from his turban pocket and puts them on the table Then he pulls off his ring]* If anything should happen, would you send these along to my wife?

[He pauses, and gives an awkward little laugh]

STANHOPE *[putting the articles together on the table]* You're coming back, old man Damn it! what on earth should I do without you?

OSBORNE *[laughing]* Goodness knows!

STANHOPE Must have somebody to tuck me up in bed *[There is a pause]* Well, I'll see you up in the sap, before you go Just have a spot of rum in that coffee

OSBORNE Righto

[STANHOPE goes to the steps and lingers for a moment]

STANHOPE Cheero!

[For a second their eyes meet, they laugh STANHOPE goes slowly up the steps There is silence in the dug-out OSBORNE has been filling his pipe, and stands lighting it as RALEIGH returns]

OSBORNE Just time for a small pipe

RALEIGH Good I'll have a cigarette, I think

[He feels in his pocket]

OSBORNE Here you are

[He offers his case to RALEIGH]

RALEIGH I say, I'm always smoking yours

OSBORNE That's all right *[Pause]*

What about this coffee?

RALEIGH Sure

[They sit at the table]

OSBORNE Are you going to have a drop of rum in it?

RALEIGH Don't you think it might make us a—a bit muzzy?

OSBORNE I'm just having the coffee as it is

RALEIGH I think I will, too

OSBORNE We'll have the rum afterwards—to celebrate

RALEIGH That's a much better idea

[They stir their coffee in silence OSBORNE'S eyes meet RALEIGH'S He smiles]

OSBORNE How d'you feel?

RALEIGH All right

OSBORNE I've got a sort of empty feeling inside

RALEIGH That's just what I've got!

OSBORNE Wind up!

RALEIGH I keep wanting to yawn

OSBORNE That's it Wind up I keep wanting to yawn too It'll pass off directly we start

RALEIGH *[taking a deep breath]* I wish we could go now

OSBORNE *[looking at his watch on the table]* We've got eight minutes yet

RALEIGH Oh, Lord!

OSBORNE Let's just have a last look at the map *[He picks up the map and spreads it out]* Directly the smoke's thick enough, I'll give the word You run straight for this point here—

RALEIGH When I get to the Boche wire I lie down and wait for you

OSBORNE Don't forget to throw your bombs

RALEIGH [*patting his pocket*] No I've got them here

OSBORNE When I shout "Righto!"—in you go with your eight men I shall lie on the Boche parapet, and blow my whistle now and then to show you where I am Pounce on the first Boche you see and bundle him out to me

RALEIGH Righto

OSBORNE Then we come back like blazes

RALEIGH The whole thing'll be over quite quickly?

OSBORNE I reckon with luck we shall be back in three minutes

RALEIGH As quick as that?

OSBORNE I think so [*He folds up the map*] And now let's forget all about it for—[*he looks at his watch*—for six minutes

RALEIGH Oh, Lord, I can't!

OSBORNE You must

RALEIGH How topping if we both get the M.C.

OSBORNE Yes [*Pause*] Your coffee sweet enough?

RALEIGH Yes, thanks It's jolly good coffee [*Pause*] I wonder what the Boche are doing over there now?

OSBORNE I don't know D'you like coffee better than tea?

RALEIGH I do for breakfast [*Pause*] Do these smoke bombs make much row when they burst?

OSBORNE Not much [*Pause*] Personally, I like cocoa for breakfast

RALEIGH [*laughing*] I'm sorry!

OSBORNE Why sorry? Why shouldn't I have cocoa for breakfast?

RALEIGH I don't mean that I—mean—I'm sorry to keep talking about the raid It's so difficult to—to talk about anything else I was just wondering—will the Boche retaliate in any way after the raid?

OSBORNE Bound to—a bit

RALEIGH Shelling?

OSBORNE "The time has come," the Walrus said,

"To talk of many things
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings"

RALEIGH "And why the sea is boiling hot—

And whether pigs have wings?"

OSBORNE Now we're off! Quick, let's talk about pigs! Black pigs or white pigs?

RALEIGH Black pigs In the New Forest you find them, quite wild

OSBORNE You know the New Forest?

RALEIGH Rather! My home's down there A little place called Allum Green just outside Lyndhurst

OSBORNE I know Lyndhurst well

RALEIGH It's rather nice down there

OSBORNE I like it more than any place I know

RALEIGH I think I do, too Of course, it's different when you've always lived in a place

OSBORNE You like it in a different way

RALEIGH Yes Just behind our house there's a stream called the Highland, it runs for miles—right through the middle of the forest Dennis and I followed it once as far as we could

OSBORNE I used to walk a lot round Lyndhurst

RALEIGH I wish we'd known each other then You could have come with Dennis and me

OSBORNE I wish I had I used to walk alone

RALEIGH You must come and stay with us one day

OSBORNE I should like to—awfully

RALEIGH I can show you places in the forest that nobody knows about except Dennis and me It gets thicker and darker and cooler, and you stir up all kinds of funny wild animals

OSBORNE They say there are ruins, somewhere in the forest, of villages that William the Conqueror pulled down to let the forest grow

RALEIGH I know We often used to look for them, but we haven't found them yet [*Pause*] You must come and help look one day

OSBORNE I'll find them all right!

RALEIGH Then you can write to the papers "Dramatic Discovery of Professor Osborne!" [*OSBORNE laughs*]

OSBORNE I did go exploring once—digging up Roman remains

RALEIGH Where was that?

OSBORNE Near my home in Sussex there's a Roman road called Stane Street, it runs as straight as a line from the coast to London

RALEIGH I know it

OSBORNE Near where I live the road runs over Bignor Hill, but in recent times a new road's been cut round the foot of the hill, meeting the old road again farther on The old road over the hill hasn't been used for years and years—and it's all

grown over with grass, and bushes and trees grow in the middle of it

RALEIGH Can you still see where it runs?

OSBORNE Quite easily, in places

RALEIGH Did you dig a bit of it up, then?

OSBORNE Yes We got permission to dig out a section It was in wonderful condition

RALEIGH Did you find anything?

OSBORNE We found a horseshoe—and a Roman penny

RALEIGH [*laughing*] Splendid!

OSBORNE It's awfully fascinating, digging like that

RALEIGH It must be [OSBORNE *glances at his watch*] Is it time yet?

OSBORNE Two minutes Then we must go up I wish we had a good hot bath waiting for us when we get back

RALEIGH So do I [*Pause*] We're having something special for dinner, aren't we?

OSBORNE How did you know? It's supposed to be a secret

RALEIGH Mason dropped a hint

OSBORNE Well, we've a fresh chicken sent up from Noyelle Farm

RALEIGH I say!

OSBORNE And a most awful luxury—two bottles of champagne and a half-dozen cigars! One each, and one spare one in case one explodes

RALEIGH I've never smoked a cigar

OSBORNE It's bound to make you sick

[RALEIGH notices OSBORNE'S ring on the table, he picks it up]

RALEIGH I say, here's your ring

OSBORNE Yes I'm—I'm leaving it here I don't want to risk losing it

RALEIGH Oh!

[*There is silence He puts the ring slowly down*]

OSBORNE [*rising*] Well, I think perhaps we ought to get ready

RALEIGH Yes Righto

[*He also rises*]

OSBORNE I'm not going to wear a belt—just my revolver, with the lanyard round my neck

RALEIGH I see [*He puts his lanyard round his neck and grips his revolver*] I feel better with this in my hand, don't you?

OSBORNE Yes Something to hold Loaded all right?

RALEIGH Yes

[*They put on their helmets* OSBORNE

takes his pipe from his mouth and lays it carefully on the table]

OSBORNE I do hate leaving a pipe when it's got a nice glow on the top like that

RALEIGH [*with a short laugh*] What a pity!

[*There is another pause OSBORNE glances at his watch as it lies on the table*]

OSBORNE Three minutes to I think we'd better go

RALEIGH Righto

[*Their eyes meet as OSBORNE turns from the table*]

OSBORNE I'm glad it's you and I—together, Raleigh

RALEIGH [*eagerly*] Are you—really?

OSBORNE Yes

RALEIGH So am I—awfully

OSBORNE We must put up a good show

RALEIGH Yes Rather!

[*There is a short pause*]

OSBORNE Let's go along, shall we?

RALEIGH Righto

[*They go towards the steps MASON comes to the entrance of his dug-out as they pass*]

MASON Good luck, sir

OSBORNE Thanks, Mason

MASON It's a lovely chicken for dinner, sir

OSBORNE [*slowly going up the steps*] Splendid!

MASON Good luck, Mr Raleigh

RALEIGH Thanks

[OSBORNE and RALEIGH go up together into the pale evening sun MASON tidies the papers on the table, picks up the two coffee mugs, and goes away There is silence in the trenches above the deserted dug-out Then, suddenly, there comes the dull "crush" of bursting smoke bombs, followed in a second by the vicious rattle of machine-guns The red and green glow of German alarm rockets comes faintly through the dug-out door Then comes the thin whistle and crash of falling shells, first one by itself, then two, almost together Quicker and quicker they come, till the noise mingles together in confused turmoil Yet the noise is deadened by the earth walls of the tiny dug-out, and comes quite softly till the whine of one shell rises above the others to a shriek and a crash A dark funnel of earth leaps up beyond the parapet of the trench outside, earth falls and rattles down

the steps, and a black cloud of smoke rises slowly out of sight Gradually the noise dies away—there is a longer pause between the crash of each bursting shell The machine-guns stop—rattle again and stop—rattle for the last time—and stop Voices are calling in the trench outside, STANHOPE'S voice is heard]

STANHOPE All right, sir Come down quickly!

COLONEL How many?

STANHOPE Only one [*Another shell whines and shrieks and crashes near by There is silence for a moment, then STANHOPE speaks again*] Hurt, sir?

COLONEL No It's all right

[*STANHOPE, pale and haggard, comes down the steps, followed by the COLONEL*]

STANHOPE [*calling up the steps*] Bring him down, sergeant-major

S-M [*above*] Coming, sir

STANHOPE [*to the COLONEL*] You won't want me, will you?

COLONEL Well—er—

STANHOPE I want to go and see those men

COLONEL Oh, all right

[*STANHOPE goes to the door, making way for the SERGEANT-MAJOR to come down, followed by a bare-headed GERMAN BOY, in field gray, sobbing bitterly Behind come two SOLDIERS with fixed bayonets STANHOPE goes up the steps The SERGEANT-MAJOR takes the GERMAN BOY by the arm and draws him into the center of the dug-out to face the COLONEL, who has seated himself at the table The two SOLDIERS stand behind*]

S-M [*soothingly to the GERMAN BOY*] All right, sonny, we ain't going to hurt you

[*Suddenly the BOY falls on his knees and sobs out some words in broken English*]

GERMAN Mercy—mister—mercy!

S-M Come on, lad, get up

[*With a huge fist he takes the BOY by the collar and draws him to his feet The BOY sobs hysterically The COLONEL clears his throat and begins in somewhat poor German*]

COLONEL Was ist Sein Regiment?

GERMAN Wurtembergisches

COLONEL Was ist der Nummer von Sein Regiment?

GERMAN Zwanzig

COLONEL [*making a note*] Twentieth

Wurtembergers [*He looks up again*] Wann kommen Sie hier?

GERMAN Gestern abend

COLONEL [*making a note and looking up again*] Wo kommen Sie her?

GERMAN [*after a moment's thought*]

Mem Geburtsort?

COLONEL [*forgetting himself for a moment*] What's that?

GERMAN [*in halting English*] You—wish—to know—where I was—born?

COLONEL No! What town did you come up to the line from?

GERMAN [*after a little hesitation*] I—do not tell you

COLONEL Oh, well, that's all right [*To the SERGEANT-MAJOR*] Search him

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR'S big fists grope over the BOY'S pockets He produces a small book*]

S-M [*giving it to the COLONEL*]

Looks like 'is pay-book, sir

COLONEL [*looking eagerly into the book*] Good

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR has found a pocket-book, the GERMAN BOY clutches at it impulsively*]

S-M 'Ere, stop that!

GERMAN Lass mich! [*He pauses*] Let—me—please—keep—that

S-M [*very embarrassed*] You let go

[*He wrenches the case away and gives it to the COLONEL*]

COLONEL [*glancing at the papers in the case*] Look like letters May be useful Is that all, sergeant-major?

S-M [*looking at a few articles in his hands*] 'Ere's a few oddments, sir—bit o' string, sir little box o' fruit drops, pocket-knife, bit o' cedar pencil—and a stick o' chocolate, sir

COLONEL Let him have those back, except the pocket-knife

S-M Very good, sir [*He turns to the GERMAN BOY with a smile*] 'Ere you are, sonny

[*The GERMAN BOY takes back the oddments*]

COLONEL All right, sergeant-major Send him straight back to my headquarters I'll question him again there

S-M Very good, sir [*He turns to the GERMAN*] Come on, sonny, up you go

[*He points up the steps*]

[*The GERMAN BOY, calm now, bows stiffly to the COLONEL and goes away, followed by the two SOLDIERS and the SERGEANT-MAJOR The COLONEL is deeply absorbed in the GERMAN'S pay-book He mutters*]

"Splendid!" to himself, then looks at his watch and rises quickly STANHOPE comes slowly down the steps]

COLONEL [excitedly] Splendid, Stanhope! We've got all we wanted—both Wurtembergers! His regiment came into the line last night I must go right away and 'phone the brigadier He'll be very pleased about it It's a feather in our cap, Stanhope

[STANHOPE has given one look of astonishment at the COLONEL and strolled past him He turns at the table and speaks in a dead voice]

STANHOPE How awfully nice—if the brigadier's pleased

[The COLONEL stares at STANHOPE and suddenly collects himself]

COLONEL Oh—er—what about the raiding-party—are they all safely back?

STANHOPE Did you expect them to be all safely back, sir?

COLONEL Oh—er—what—er—

STANHOPE Four men and Raleigh came safely back, sir

COLONEL Oh I say, I'm sorry! That's—er—six men and—er—Osborne?

STANHOPE Yes, sir

COLONEL I'm very sorry Poor Osborne!

STANHOPE Still it'll be awfully nice if the brigadier's pleased

COLONEL Don't be silly, Stanhope Do you know—er—what happened to Osborne?

STANHOPE A hand grenade—while he was waiting for Raleigh

COLONEL I'm very sorry And the six men?

STANHOPE Machine-gun bullets, I suppose

COLONEL Yes I was afraid—er—

[His words trail away, he fidgets uneasily as STANHOPE looks at him with a pale, expressionless face RALEIGH comes slowly down the steps, walking as though he were asleep, his hands are bleeding The COLONEL turns to the boy with enthusiasm] Very well done, Raleigh Well done, my boy I'll get you a Military Cross for this! Splendid! [RALEIGH looks at the COLONEL and tries to speak He raises his hand to his forehead and sways The COLONEL takes him by the arm] Sit down here, my boy [RALEIGH sits on the edge of OSBORNE'S bed] Have a good rest Well, I must be off [He moves towards the steps, and turns once more to RALEIGH as he leaves] Very well done

[With a quick glance at STANHOPE,

the COLONEL goes away There is silence now in the trenches outside, the last shell has whistled over and crashed Dusk is beginning to fall over the German lines The glow of Very lights begins to rise and fade against the evening sky STANHOPE is staring dumbly at the table—at OSBORNE'S watch and ring Presently he turns his haggard face towards RALEIGH, who sits with lowered head, looking at the palms of his hands STANHOPE moves slowly across towards the doorway, and pauses to look down at RALEIGH RALEIGH looks up into STANHOPE'S face, and their eyes meet When STANHOPE speaks, his voice is still expressionless and dead]

STANHOPE Must you sit on Osborne's bed?

[He turns and goes slowly up the steps RALEIGH rises unsteadily, murmurs "sorry"—and stands with lowered head Heavy guns are booming miles away]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II—Late evening on the same day The dug-out is lit quite festively by an unusual number of candles Two champagne bottles stand prominently on the table Dinner is over

STANHOPE, with a cigar between his teeth, lounges across the table, one elbow among the plates and mugs His hair is ruffled, there is a bright red flush on his cheeks He has just made a remark which has sent HIBBERT and TROTTER into uproarious laughter, he listens with a smile TROTTER is sitting on the box to the right of the table, leaning back against the wall A cigar is embedded in his podgy fingers, his face is a shiny scarlet, with deep red patches below the ears The three bottom buttons of his tunic are undone, and now and then his hand steals gently over his distended stomach HIBBERT sits on the bed to the left, his thin white fingers nervously twitching the ash from his cigar His pale face is shiny with sweat from the heat of the candles, his laugh is high-pitched and excited TROTTER speaks in a husky voice as the laughter dies away

TROTTER And what did she say to that?

STANHOPE She said, "Not in these trousers!"—in French

[TROTTER and HIBBERT burst into laughter again]

TROTTER [coughing and wheezing] Oh—dear-o-dear!

STANHOPE I simply drew myself up and said, "Very well, mam'sel, have it your own way."

TROTTER And she did?

STANHOPE No She didn't

[Again the others laugh TROTTER wipes a tear from his eye]

TROTTER Oh, skipper, you are a scream—and no mistake!

HIBBERT I never forget picking up a couple of tarts one night and taking 'em out to dinner

TROTTER [winking at STANHOPE] 'E's orf again

HIBBERT We drank enough bubbly to sink a battleship—

STANHOPE To float a battleship

HIBBERT Well—to float a battleship Then I took 'em for a joy-ride out to Maidenhead—did sixty all the way We danced a bit at Skindles, and drank a lot of port and muck Then damned if I didn't lose the way coming back—got landed miles from anywhere And those tarts began cursing me like hell—said I'd done it on purpose I said if they didn't damn well shut up I'd chuck 'em both out in the road and leave 'em

STANHOPE [ironically] Hurrah! That's the idea! Treat 'em rough!

HIBBERT [giggling] That shut 'em up all right! Then I started doing about sixty down all sorts of roads—I went round a corner on two wheels with those girls' hair on end—didn't have any more trouble from them!

[He chuckles at the memory, and takes an unsteady gulp of champagne]

STANHOPE You're the sort of fellow who makes girls hard to please

TROTTER [heavily] Well, I never 'ad no motorcar, my old lady and me used to walk, legs is good enough for me

STANHOPE You satisfied with legs?

TROTTER I am—yes!

STANHOPE Much cheaper

HIBBERT [laughing delightedly] That's damn good!

STANHOPE [raising his mug] Well, here's to a toast to legs—God bless 'em!

HIBBERT [raising his mug] Good old legs!

TROTTER [raising his mug] Shank's mare

STANHOPE Shank's what?

TROTTER Shank's mare, they call 'em STANHOPE Call what?

TROTTER Why—legs

HIBBERT [almost screaming with delight] Oh, Trotter! you're a dream!

TROTTER [turning a baleful eye on HIBBERT] You've 'ad too much champagne, you 'ave

[HIBBERT takes a leather case from his pocket and produces some picture post-cards]

HIBBERT I say, I've never shown you these, have I?

[He hands them one by one to STANHOPE, smiling up into STANHOPE'S face for approval]

STANHOPE Where did you get these from?

HIBBERT In Bethune [He hands up a card] She's all right, isn't she?

STANHOPE Too fat

HIBBERT [looking over STANHOPE'S shoulder] Oh, I don't know

STANHOPE Much too fat [He hands the card to TROTTER] What do you think, Trotter?

[TROTTER takes a pair of pince-nez from his pocket, balances them on his fat nose, and looks at the picture]

HIBBERT All right, isn't she?

TROTTER Well, I don't know If you ask me I'd rather 'ave a decent picture of Margate Pier

HIBBERT [impatiently] Oh, you don't understand art [He hands another card to STANHOPE] There's a nice pair of legs for you

STANHOPE Too thin—aren't they, Trotter? [He hands TROTTER the card]

TROTTER [after some thought] Scraggy, I call 'em

HIBBERT [handing STANHOPE another card] That's the one I like best

STANHOPE Not bad

HIBBERT Glorious bedroom eyes

STANHOPE She's all right

HIBBERT Ever seen that show Zip at the Hippodrome? Couple of damn fine girls in that—twins Did you see 'em, skipper?

STANHOPE [wearily] I don't know—seen stacks of shows—can't remember them all [He brightens up] Now then, swallow up that bubbly! Hi! Mason!

MASON Yessir! [MASON appears]

STANHOPE Bring some whisky

MASON Yessir [He disappears]

TROTTER What? Whisky on top of champagne?

STANHOPE Why not? It's all right

TROTTER Well, I don't know, doesn't

sound right to me I feel as if somebody's blown me up with a bicycle pump

STANHOPE You look it, too

TROTTER [*blowing a stream of cigar smoke up to the dark ceiling*] Any'ow, it was a jolly bit o' chicken—and I'd go a mile any day for a chunk o' that jam pudding

[*MASON brings a bottle of whisky*]

STANHOPE Your pudding's made Mr Trotter feel all blown out, Mason

MASON I'm sorry, sir, it wasn't meant, sir

TROTTER It was all right, Mason, take it from me I know a decent bit o' pudden when I see it

MASON It was only boiled ration biscuits and jam, sir [*He turns to STANHOPE*] I thought I better tell you, sir—this is the last bottle

STANHOPE The last bottle! Why, damn it, we brought six!

MASON I know, sir But five's gone

STANHOPE Where the devil's it gone to?

MASON Well, sir, you remember there was one on the first night—and then one—

STANHOPE Oh, for Lord's sake don't go through them one by one, this'll last till sunrise [*He turns to TROTTER and HIBBERT*] Sunrise to-morrow, my lads!

TROTTER Oh, forget that

STANHOPE You bet we will! Now then! Who's for a spot of whisky?

TROTTER I reckon I'm about full up I'd like a nice cup o' tea, Mason

MASON Very good, sir [*He goes out*]

STANHOPE Tea!

TROTTER Yes That's what I want Decent cup o' tea Still, I'll just have about a spoonful o' whisky—got a touch of palpitations

STANHOPE Here you are—say when!

TROTTER Wo! That's enough!

STANHOPE You'll have a decent spot, won't you, Hibbert?

HIBBERT Yes I'm game!

TROTTER [*swallowing a hiccup*] Just a cup o' tea—then I'll go and relieve young Raleigh Pity 'e didn't come down to supper

STANHOPE I told him to I told him to come down for an hour and let the sergeant-major take over

TROTTER I wonder why 'e didn't come

HIBBERT That 'ad's too keen on his "duty" He told me he liked being up there with the men better than down here with us

STANHOPE [*quietly*] He said that?

HIBBERT Yes I told him about the chicken and champagne and cigars—and he stared at me and said, "You're not having that, are you?"—just as if he thought we were going to chuck it away!

TROTTER I reckon that raid shook 'im up more'n we thought I like that youngster 'E's got pluck Strong lad, too—the way he came back through the smoke after that raid, carrying that Boche under 'is arm like a baby

HIBBERT Did you see him afterwards, though? He came into that dug-out and never said a word—didn't seem to know where he was

TROTTER Well, 'e's only a lad

STANHOPE [*to HIBBERT*] He actually told you he preferred being up with the men better than down here?

HIBBERT That's what he said

TROTTER Well, I 'ope 'e gets the M C, that's all, 'e's just the kid I'd like if I ever 'ave a kid—strong and plucky

STANHOPE Oh, for God's sake forget that bloody raid! Think I want to talk about it?

TROTTER [*surprised*] No—but, after all—

STANHOPE Well—shut up!

TROTTER [*uneasily*] All right—all right

STANHOPE We were having a jolly decent evening till you started blabbing about the war

TROTTER I didn't start it

STANHOPE You did

TROTTER You began it about—

STANHOPE Well, for God's sake stop it, then!

TROTTER All right—all right

HIBBERT Did I ever tell you the story about the girl I met in Soho?

STANHOPE I don't know—I expect you did

HIBBERT [*undismayed*] It'll amuse you I'd been to a dance, and I was coming home quite late—

STANHOPE Yes, and it's late now You go on duty at eleven You better go and get some sleep

HIBBERT It's all right I'm as fresh as a daisy

STANHOPE You may be But go to bed

HIBBERT What?

STANHOPE [*louder*] I said, "Go to bed!"

HIBBERT I say, that's a nice end to a jolly evening!

STANHOPE I'm sorry I'm tired

HIBBERT [*perky*] Well, you better go to bed!

[*There is silence STANHOPE looks at HIBBERT, who smuggers*]

STANHOPE What was that you said?

HIBBERT I was only joking

STANHOPE I asked what you said

HIBBERT I said, "You better go to bed"

[*STANHOPE'S flushed face is looking full into HIBBERT'S HIBBERT gives the ghost of a smugger*]

STANHOPE Clear out of here!

HIBBERT [*rising unsteadily*], What—d'you mean?

STANHOPE Get out of here, for God's sake!

HIBBERT [*blustering*] I say—look here—

STANHOPE Get out of my sight! [*With a frightened glance at STANHOPE, HIBBERT sneaks quietly away into his dug-out There is silence, and the guns can be heard—deep and ominous*] Little worm gets on my nerves

TROTTER Poor little bloke Never seen 'im so cheerful before out 'ere

STANHOPE Doesn't he nearly drive you mad?

TROTTER I reckon 'e only wanted to keep cheerful

STANHOPE Doesn't his repulsive little mind make you sick? [*MASON brings TROTTER'S mug of tea and goes away*] I envy you, Trotter Nothing upsets you, does it? You're always the same

TROTTER Always the same, am I? [*He sighs*] Little you know—

STANHOPE You never get sick to death of everything, or so happy you want to sing

TROTTER I don't know—I whistle sometimes

STANHOPE But you always *feel* the same

TROTTER I feel all blown out now [*There is a pause TROTTER sips his tea and STANHOPE takes a whisky*] 'Ere's 'Ibber's post-cards Funny a bloke carrying pictures like this about Satisfies 'is lust, I s'pose—poor little feller [*He rises*] Well, I'll go and relieve young Raleigh Pity 'e didn't come down to supper

[*He tries to button his tunic, without success He buckles his webbing belt over his unbuttoned tunic, puts on his helmet, and slings his respirator over his shoulder*] Well, cheero!

STANHOPE You realize you're my second-in-command now, don't you?

TROTTER Well, you 'adn't said nothing about it, but—

STANHOPE Well, you are

TROTTER Righto, skipper [*He pauses*] Thanks [*He goes towards the door*] I won't let you down

STANHOPE After your duty, have a decent sleep We must be ready at half-past five

TROTTER Righto, skipper Well, I'll be going up Give me a chance to cool off up there It's as 'ot as 'ell in 'ere, with all them damn candles burning

STANHOPE I suppose it is My head's nearly splitting

[*He blows out three of the candles, leaving the dim light of one*]

TROTTER [*half up the steps*] There's a bit of a mist rising

STANHOPE [*dully*] Is there? [*TROTTER disappears into the night STANHOPE broods over the table*] Mason!

MASON [*outside*] Yessir!

STANHOPE You can bring Mr Raleigh's dinner

MASON Very good, sir

[*MASON brings a plate of steaming food, gathering up and taking away some of the used crockery Presently RALEIGH comes slowly down the steps He pauses at the bottom, takes off his helmet, and hesitates STANHOPE is sitting at the table puffing at the remains of his cigar There is silence except for the rumble of the guns*]

STANHOPE I thought I told you to come down to dinner at eight o'clock?

RALEIGH Oh, I'm sorry I didn't think you—er—

STANHOPE Well? You didn't think I—er—what?

RALEIGH I didn't think you'd—you'd mind—if I didn't

STANHOPE I see And why do you think I asked you—if I didn't mind?

RALEIGH I'm sorry

STANHOPE Well, we've kept your dinner It's ready for you here

RALEIGH Oh, it's awfully good of you to have kept it for me, but I—I had something to eat up there

STANHOPE You—had something to eat up there? What do you mean, exactly?

RALEIGH They brought the tea around while I was on duty I had a cup, and some bread and cheese

STANHOPE Are you telling me—you've been feeding with the men?

RALEIGH Well, Sergeant Baker suggested—

STANHOPE So you take your orders from Sergeant Baker, do you?

RALEIGH No, but—

STANHOPE You eat the men's rations when there's barely enough for each man?

RALEIGH They asked me to share

STANHOPE Now, look here I know you're new to this, but I thought you'd have the common sense to leave the men alone to their meals Do you think they want an officer prowling round eating their rations, and sucking up to them like that? My officers are here to be respected—not laughed at

RALEIGH Why did they ask me—if they didn't mean it?

STANHOPE Don't you realize they were making a fool of you?

RALEIGH Why should they?

STANHOPE So you know more about my men than I do?

[*There is silence RALEIGH is facing STANHOPE squarely*]

RALEIGH I'm sorry then—if I was wrong

STANHOPE Sit down

RALEIGH It's all right, thanks

STANHOPE [*suddenly shouting*] Sit down! [*RALEIGH sits on the box to the right of the table STANHOPE speaks quietly again*] I understand you prefer being up there with the men than being down here with us?

RALEIGH I don't see what you mean

STANHOPE What did you tell Hibbert?

RALEIGH Hibbert? I—I didn't say

STANHOPE Don't lie

RALEIGH [*rising*] I'm not lying! Why should I—lie?

STANHOPE Then why didn't you come down to supper when I told you to?

RALEIGH I—I wasn't hungry I had rather a headache It's cooler up there

STANHOPE You insulted Trotter and Hibbert by not coming You realize that, I suppose?

RALEIGH I didn't mean to do anything like that

STANHOPE Well, you did You know now—don't you? [*RALEIGH makes no reply He is trying to understand why STANHOPE'S temper has risen to a trembling fury STANHOPE can scarcely control his voice Loudly*] I say—you know now, don't you?

RALEIGH Yes I'm sorry

STANHOPE My officers work together I'll have no damn prigs

RALEIGH I'll speak to Trotter and Hibbert I didn't realize—

[*STANHOPE raises his cigar His hand trembles so violently that he can scarcely take the cigar between his teeth RALEIGH looks at STANHOPE, fascinated and horrified*]

STANHOPE What are you looking at?

RALEIGH [*lowering his head*] Nothing

STANHOPE Anything—funny about me?

RALEIGH No [*After a moment's silence RALEIGH speaks in a low, halting voice*] I'm awfully sorry, Dennis, if—I annoyed you by coming to your company

STANHOPE What on earth are you talking about? What do you mean?

RALEIGH You resent my being here

STANHOPE Resent you being here?

RALEIGH Ever since I came—

STANHOPE I don't know what you mean I resent you being a damn fool, that's all [*There is a pause*] Better eat your dinner before it's cold

RALEIGH I'm not hungry, thanks

STANHOPE Oh, for God's sake, sit down and eat it like a man!

RALEIGH I can't eat it, thanks

STANHOPE [*shouting*] Are you going to eat your dinner?

RALEIGH Oh! Good God! Don't you understand? How can I sit down and eat that—when—[*his voice is nearly breaking*]
—when Osborne's—lying—out there—

[*STANHOPE rises slowly His eyes are wide and staring, he is fighting for breath, and his words come brokenly*]

STANHOPE My God! You bloody little swine! You think I don't care—you think you're the only soul that cares!

RALEIGH And yet you can sit there and drink champagne—and smoke cigars

STANHOPE The one man I could trust—my best friend—the one man I could talk to as man to man—who understood everything—and you think I don't care

RALEIGH But how can you when—?

STANHOPE To forget, you little fool—to forget! D'you understand? To forget! You think there's no limit to what a man can bear?

[*He turns quickly from RALEIGH and goes to the dark corner by OSBORNE'S bed He stands with his*

face towards the wall, his shoulders heaving as he fights for breath]

RALEIGH I'm awfully sorry, Dennis I—I didn't understand [STANHOPE makes no reply] You don't know how—I—

STANHOPE Go away, please—leave me alone

RALEIGH Can't I—

[STANHOPE turns wildly upon RALEIGH]

STANHOPE Oh, get out! For God's sake, get out!

[RALEIGH goes away into his dug-out, and STANHOPE is alone The Very lights rise and fall outside, softly breaking the darkness with their glow—sometimes steel-blue, sometimes gray Through the night there comes the impatient grumble of gunfire that never dies away]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE III—Towards dawn The candles are no longer burning The intense darkness of the dug-out is softened by the glow of the Very lights in the sky beyond the doorway There is no sound except the distant mutter of the guns A MAN comes from the servants' dug-out, for a moment his head and shoulders stand out black against the glowing sky, then he passes on into the darkness by the table There comes the rasp of a striking match—a tiny flame—and a candle gleams MASON blinks in the light and turns to STANHOPE'S bed STANHOPE lies huddled with his blanket drawn tightly round him

MASON [softly] Sir— [STANHOPE does not move, MASON shakes him gently by the knee A little louder] Sir—

STANHOPE Yes? [There is a pause] That you, Mason?

MASON 'Art-past five, sir

STANHOPE Oh, right [He raises himself on his elbow] I was only half asleep I keep on waking up It's so frightfully cold in here

MASON It's a cold dug-out, this one, sir I've made some 'ot tea

STANHOPE Good You might bring me some

MASON Right you are, sir

STANHOPE And take some to the officers in there—and wake them up

MASON Very good, sir

[MASON goes to his dug-out STANHOPE rises stiffly from his bed, shudders from the cold, and slowly begins putting his equipment on TROTTER wanders in from his dug-out vigorously lathering his face He is dressed, except for his collar]

TROTTER Wash and brush-up, tup-pence!

STANHOPE [looking up, surprised] Hullo! I thought you were asleep

TROTTER I 'ad a decent sleep when I came off dooty What's the time?

STANHOPE Half-past five It'll be getting light soon You better buck up

TROTTER All right I shan't be long Sounds quiet enough out there

STANHOPE Yes

[MASON brings four mugs of tea]

TROTTER Ah! that's what I want A decent cup of tea

MASON [putting a mug on the table for STANHOPE] Nice and 'ot, sir I've cut a packet of sambridge for each gentleman, sir

STANHOPE Good

[MASON takes the other mugs of tea into the right-hand dug-out TROTTER follows, lathering with gusto]

STANHOPE You might give Hibbert and Raleigh a call

TROTTER I woke 'em up, skipper They're getting their things on

[MASON returns]

STANHOPE When you've cleared up your kitchen, you must dress and join your platoon in the line

MASON Very good, sir

STANHOPE If things are going well at eleven o'clock, come down here and do your best to get some lunch for us We shall come down in turn as we can

MASON Very good, sir

[STANHOPE sits at the table and begins to write a short report The first sign of dawn is beginning to gleam in the dark sky STANHOPE calls "Runner!" as he writes A SOLDIER comes from the servants' dug-out]

STANHOPE [folding the note] Take this to Battalion Headquarters There's no reply

SOLDIER Yessir

[The SOLDIER salutes and goes up the steps A plaintive noise comes from the other dug-out TROTTER is singing "There's a long, long trail a-winding" STANHOPE listens for a moment, then rises, takes a few small

comes from his pocket, and throws them into TROTTER'S dug-out The singing stops abruptly After a moment TROTTER'S voice comes]

TROTTER Thank you kindly, gov'nor!
[The SERGEANT-MAJOR comes down the steps]

STANHOPE Morning, sergeant-major

S-M Morning, sir Wiring parties are just in, sir Made a decent job of it—right down to the support line

STANHOPE Good Everything quiet?

S-M It's all right opposite 'ere, sir, but the guns are goin' 'ard down south 'Eavy bombardment Not sure if it ain't spreading up this way, sir

STANHOPE Very likely it is The officers are coming up in a minute They'll stand by with their platoons I must stay here awhile in case of messages I shall come up directly things begin to happen

S-M Very good, sir

STANHOPE Are the men having their tea?

S-M Yessir

STANHOPE Let 'em have a decent drop of rum

S-M About 'arf again, sir?

STANHOPE Yes

S-M If the attack don't come, sir, 'ow long are we to stand-to?

STANHOPE We must expect the attack any time up till midday After then I don't think it'll come till to-morrow

S-M Very good, sir

STANHOPE We must naturally make our plans to meet things as they happen

S-M Quite, sir

STANHOPE All right, sergeant-major I'll see you up there soon

S-M Yes, sir

[He salutes and goes away MASON brings in four little packets of sandwiches, and puts one packet on the table for STANHOPE]

MASON Your sambridges, sir 'Arf bully beef and 'arf sardine Sardine on top, sir

STANHOPE How delicious No *pâté de foie gras*?

MASON No what, sir?

STANHOPE No *pâté de foie gras*?

MASON No, sir The milkman 'asn't been yet

[MASON takes the other parcels to the left-hand dug-out STANHOPE pours a little whiskey into his tea and the remainder of the contents of the bottle into his flask MASON returns]

STANHOPE Get dressed as soon as you can

MASON Yessir

[MASON goes out TROTTER comes in, fully dressed for the line]

TROTTER All ready, skipper Want me to go up?

STANHOPE Yes I think so Go right round the line and see everything's all right I'll be up soon

[Suddenly there comes the faint whistle and thud of falling shells—a few seconds between each STANHOPE and TROTTER listen intently, four shells fall, then silence]

TROTTER 'Ulllo, 'ullo

[STANHOPE strides to the doorway, goes up a few steps, and looks out into the night He comes slowly back]

STANHOPE Over on Lancer's Alley—somewhere by the reserve line

[There comes the louder thud of three more shells]

TROTTER That's nearer

STANHOPE Better go up, Trotter Call the others

TROTTER [at the left-hand dug-out] 'Ibbert! Raleigh! come on! [He lights a cigarette over the candle—lingers a moment, and slowly goes up the steps] Cheero, skipper See you later

STANHOPE Send your runner down to tell me how things are going

TROTTER Righto

[TROTTER disappears into the dark A vague white line of dawn is broadening above the dark trench wall outside STANHOPE sits at the table and sips his tea He takes a cigarette and lights it with a quivering hand RALEIGH comes from his dug-out STANHOPE lowers his head and writes in his note-book]

RALEIGH Do you want me to go up?

STANHOPE [without looking up] Yes Trotter's gone

RALEIGH Right [He goes to the steps and turns shyly] Cheero—Stanhope

STANHOPE [still writing with lowered head] Cheero, Raleigh I shall be coming up soon [RALEIGH goes up the steps STANHOPE stops writing, raises his head, and listens The shells are falling steadily now He glances towards the left-hand dug-out and calls] Hibbert! [There is no reply He slowly rises and goes to the left-hand dug-out doorway He calls again—louder] Hibbert! [He looks into the

doorway and says] What are you doing? [HIBBERT appears He is very pale, he moves as if half asleep] Come along, man!

HIBBERT You want me to go up now?

STANHOPE Of course I do The others have gone

HIBBERT Got a drop of water?

STANHOPE What d'you want water for?

HIBBERT I'm so frightfully thirsty All that champagne and stuff—dried my mouth up

[STANHOPE pours a drop of water into a mug and gives it to HIBBERT]

STANHOPE Here you are Didn't you have tea?

HIBBERT Yes It was a bit sweet, though

[The shelling is steadily increasing, and now, above the lighter "crush" of the smaller shells, there comes the deep resounding "boom" of Minenwerfer HIBBERT sips his water very slowly, rinsing his mouth deliberately with each sip STANHOPE is by the doorway, looking up into the trench He has just turned away as a sonorous drawn-o it call comes floating through the dawn "Stretcher bear—ers!" STANHOPE half turns, then faces HIBBERT]

STANHOPE Come on Buck up

HIBBERT There's no appalling hurry, is there?

STANHOPE No hurry! Why d'you think the others have gone up?

HIBBERT [slowly] What? Trotter and Raleigh?

STANHOPE [sharply] Wake up, man! What the devil's the matter with you?

HIBBERT [slowly putting down his mug] Champagne dries the mouth up so Makes the tongue feel like a bit of paper

[There is a slight pause]

STANHOPE The longer you say here, the harder it'll be to go up

HIBBERT Good Lord! You don't think I'm —

STANHOPE You're just wasting as much time as you can

HIBBERT Well, damn it, it's no good going up till I feel fit Let's just have another spot of water

[HIBBERT takes the mug and pours out a little more water He is the picture of misery STANHOPE stands im-

patiently beside him MASON appears from his dug-out, fully dressed for the line, his rifle slung over his shoulder]

MASON I'll go right along sir I've made up the fire to last a good three hours—if you don't mind me popping down about nine o'clock to 'ave a look at it

STANHOPE All right, Mason Mr Hibbert's coming up now You can go along with him

MASON [to HIBBERT] I'd like to come along of you if you don't mind, sir I ain't bin up in this part of the front line Don't want to get lost

STANHOPE Mr Hibbert'll show you the way up [He turns to HIBBERT] Keep your men against the back wall of the trench as long as the shells are dropping behind Cheero! [HIBBERT looks at STANHOPE for a moment, then with a slight smile, he goes slowly up the steps and into the trench, MASON following behind A dark figure stands out against the pale sky, comes hurrying down the steps—a PRIVATE SOLDIER, out of breath and excited] Yes?

SOLDIER Message from Mr Trotter, sir Shells falling mostly behind support line Minnies along front line

STANHOPE Who's just been hit?

SOLDIER Corporal Ross, I think it was, sir Minnie dropped in the trench at the corner—just as I come away

[The SERGEANT-MAJOR comes down the steps very much out of breath]

STANHOPE [to the SOLDIER] All right, thanks

[The SOLDIER salutes, and goes up the steps slower than he came down]

S-M Beginning to get 'ot, sir

STANHOPE Corporal Ross hit?

S-M Yessir

STANHOPE Badly?

S-M Pretty badly, sir

STANHOPE Most of the shelling's going over, isn't it?

S-M Most of the shells is be'ind, sir, but there's Minnies and rifle grenades along the front line Pretty 'ot it's getting, sir They're attacking down south—there's rifle fire

STANHOPE All right, sergeant-major, thanks

S-M What I come to ask, sir—what about the wounded—getting 'em down sir? The shelling's pretty thick over Lancaster's Alley

STANHOPE What about Fosse Way?

S-M Pretty bad there, too, sir

STANHOPE Don't try then Take any one badly hit down into the big dug-out on the right Let the stretcher-bearers do what they can there

S-M Very good, sir

STANHOPE Only Corporal Ross hit?

S-M That's all, sir —

[*Again there comes the drawn-out call—several times as it passed from man to man "Stretcher bear—ers!" The SERGEANT-MAJOR'S eyes meet STANHOPE'S He turns and goes up the steps STANHOPE is alone Flying fragments of shell whistle and hiss and moan overhead The sharp "crack" of the rifle grenades, the thud of the shells, and the boom of the Minenwerfer mingle together in a muffled roar STANHOPE takes his belt from the table and buckles it on, puts his revolver lanyard round his neck, and drops his flask and sandwiches into his pocket The SERGEANT-MAJOR reappears and comes hurrying down the steps*]

STANHOPE [*turning quickly*] What is it, sergeant-major?

S-M Mr Raleigh, sir —

STANHOPE What!

S-M Mr Raleigh's been 'it, sir Bit of shell's got 'im in the back

STANHOPE Badly?

S-M 'Fraid it's broke 'is spine, sir, can't move 'is legs

STANHOPE Bring him down here

S-M Down 'ere, sir?

STANHOPE [*shouting*] Yes! Down here—quickly!

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR hurries up the steps A shell screams and bursts very near The SERGEANT-MAJOR shrinks back and throws his hand across his face, as though a human hand could ward off the hot flying pieces He stumbles on again into the trench, and hurriedly away STANHOPE is by OSBORNE'S bed, fumbling a blanket over it He takes a trench coat off the wall and rolls it for a pillow He goes to his own bed, takes up his blanket, and turns as the SERGEANT-MAJOR comes carefully down the steps carrying RALEIGH like a child in his huge arms*]

STANHOPE [*with blanket ready*] Lay him down there

S-M 'E's fainted, sir 'E was conscious when I picked 'im up

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR lays the boy*

gently on the bed, he draws away his hands, looks furtively at the palms, and wipes the blood on the sides of his trousers STANHOPE covers RALEIGH with his blanket, looks intently at the boy, and turns to the SERGEANT-MAJOR]

STANHOPE Have they dressed the wound?

S-M They've just put a pad on it, sir Can't do no more

STANHOPE Go at once and bring two men with a stretcher

S-M We'll never get 'im down, sir, with them shells falling on Lancer's Alley

STANHOPE Did you hear what I said? Go and get two men with a stretcher

S-M [*after a moment's hesitation*] Very good, sir

[*The SERGEANT-MAJOR goes slowly away STANHOPE turns to RALEIGH once more, then goes to the table, pushes his handkerchief into the water-jug, and brings it, wringing wet, to RALEIGH'S bed He bathes the boy's face Presently RALEIGH gives a little moan, opens his eyes, and turns his head*]

RALEIGH Hullo—Dennis —

STANHOPE Well, Jimmy—[*he smiles*]—you got one quickly

[*There is silence for a while STANHOPE is sitting on a box beside RALEIGH Presently RALEIGH speaks again—in a wondering voice*]

RALEIGH Why—how did I get down here?

STANHOPE Sergeant-major brought you down

[*RALEIGH speaks again, vaguely, trying to recollect*]

RALEIGH Something—hit me in the back—knocked me clean over—sort of—winded me—I'm all right now

[*He tries to rise*]

STANHOPE Steady, old boy Just lie there quietly for a bit

RALEIGH I'll be better if I get up and walk about It happened once before—I got kicked in just the same place at football, it—it soon wore off It—it just numbs you a bit [*There is a pause*]

What's that rumbling noise?

STANHOPE The guns are making a bit of a row

RALEIGH Our guns?

STANHOPE No Mostly theirs

[*Again there is silence in the dug-out A very faint rose light is beginning to glow in the dawn sky RALEIGH speaks again—uneasily*]

RALEIGH I say—Dennis—

STANHOPE Yes, old boy?

RALEIGH It—it hasn't gone through, has it? It only just hit me?—and knocked me down?

STANHOPE It's just gone through a bit, Jimmy

RALEIGH I won't have to—go on lying here?

STANHOPE I'm going to have you taken away

RALEIGH Away? Where?

STANHOPE Down to the dressing-station—then hospital—then home [*He smiles*] You've got a Blighty one, Jimmy

RALEIGH But I—I can't go home just for—for a block in the back [*He stirs restlessly*] I'm certain I'll be better if—I get up [*He tries to raise himself, and gives a sudden cry*] Oh—God! It does hurt!

STANHOPE It's bound to hurt, Jimmy

RALEIGH What's—on my legs? Something holding them down—

STANHOPE It's all right, old chap, it's just the shock—numbed them

[*Again there is a pause When RALEIGH speaks there is a different note in his voice*]

RALEIGH It's awfully decent of you to bother, Dennis I feel rotten lying here—everybody else—up there

STANHOPE It's not your fault, Jimmy

RALEIGH So—damn—silly—getting hit [*Pause*] Is there—just a drop of water?

STANHOPE [*Rising quickly*] Sure I've got some here [*He pours some water into the mug and brings it to RALEIGH Cheerfully*] Got some tea-leaves in it D'you mind?

RALEIGH No That's all right—thanks— [*STANHOPE holds the mug to RALEIGH'S lips, and the boy drinks*] I say, Dennis, don't you wait—if—if you want to be getting on

STANHOPE It's quite all right, Jimmy

RALEIGH Can you stay for a bit?

STANHOPE Of course I can

RALEIGH [*faintly*] Thanks awfully [*There is quiet in the dug-out for a long time STANHOPE sits with one hand on RALEIGH'S arm, and RALEIGH lies very still Presently he speaks again—hardly above a whisper*] Dennis—

STANHOPE Yes, old boy?

RALEIGH Could we have a light? It's—it's so frightfully dark and cold

STANHOPE [*Rising*] Sure! I'll bring a

candle and get another blanket [*STANHOPE goes to the left-hand dug-out, and RALEIGH is alone, very still and quiet, on OSBORNE'S bed The faint rosy glow of the dawn is deepening to an angry red The gray night sky is dissolving, and the stars begin to go A tiny sound comes from where RALEIGH is lying—something between a sob and a moan STANHOPE comes back with a blanket He takes a candle from the table and carries it to RALEIGH'S bed He puts it on the box beside RALEIGH and speaks cheerfully*] Is that better, Jimmy? [*RALEIGH makes no sign*] Jimmy—

[*Still RALEIGH is quiet STANHOPE gently takes his hand There is a long silence STANHOPE lowers RALEIGH'S hand to the bed, rises, and takes the candle back to the table He sits on the bench behind the table with his back to the wall, and stares listlessly across at the boy on OSBORNE'S bed The solitary candle flame throws up the lines of his pale, drawn face, and the dark shadows under his tired eyes The thudding of the shells rises and falls like an angry sea A PRIVATE SOLDIER comes scrambling down the steps, his round, red face wet with perspiration, his chest heaving for breath*]

SOLDIER Message from Mr Trotter, sir—will you come at once [*STANHOPE gazes round at the SOLDIER—and makes no other sign*] Mr Trotter, sir—says will you come at once!

[*STANHOPE rises stiffly and takes his helmet from the table*]

STANHOPE All right, Broughton, I'm coming

[*The SOLDIER turns and goes away STANHOPE pauses for a moment by OSBORNE'S bed and lightly runs his fingers over RALEIGH'S tousled hair He goes stiffly up the steps, his tall figure black against the dawn sky The shelling has risen to a great fury The solitary candle burns with a steady flame, and RALEIGH lies in the shadows The whine of a shell rises to a shriek and bursts on the dug-out roof The shock stabs out the candle-flame, the timber props of the door cave slowly in, sandbags fall and block the passage to the open air There is darkness in the dug-out Here and there the red dawn glows through the jagged holes of the broken doorway*]

*Very faintly there come the dull rattle
of machine-guns and the fevered spatter
of rifle fire]*

THE PLAY ENDS

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THE FAR-OFF HILLS
(1928)
BY
LENNOX ROBINSON

CHARACTERS

PATRICK CLANCY
MARIAN
DOROTHEA ("DUCKY") } *his daughters*
ANNA ("PET") }
DICK DELANY
OLIVER O'SHAUGHNESSY
HAROLD MAHONY
SUSIE TYNAN
PIERCE HEGARTY
ELLEN NOLAN

The first and third acts take place in the Clancys' dining-room, the second act in the girls'—DUCKY's and PET's—bedroom. No time elapses between the first and second acts, but several weeks elapse between the second and third.

LENNOX ROBINSON

ONE of the horrors of the commercial theater is the Irish play written by an Englishman or American who knows little or nothing of Irish life, speech, and character, and who perpetuates, to the delight of sentimental audiences, conventional but utterly absurd notions of Ireland and its people. Ravished for centuries by internecine political strife and frequent famines, the stormy little island could hardly develop as its typical inhabitant the mythical stage Irishman—a laughing, carefree sentimentalist, very quaint, kindly, philanthropic, brilliantly witty, bursting periodically into rollicking song. In farces, melodramas, and romances, in vaudeville, in sentimental song, and finally in moving pictures the myth continues, falsifying both character and speech. Such locutions as "top o' the morning" and "a froth of a boy" belong to this stage Irishman. To find the flavor of real Irish talk, one should read the short comedies of Lady Gregory, or the peasant plays of Synge, who made a painstaking study of the genuine idiom.

For authentic Irish comedy one should turn to the work of Synge, Lady Gregory, Shiels, Robinson, Colum, and Fitzmaurice. Irish humor is largely intellectual, as opposed to sentimental; the comedies of Sir James M. Barrie, for example, have never succeeded in the Irish theater. Even the comedies of the expatriated Irishmen—Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw, Ervine—are far removed from the drama of sensibility. The bold juxtaposition of rich comedy and bitter, ironic tragedy in the strange plays of Sean O'Casey is perhaps faithful to Irish life as O'Casey views it, but it is sometimes confusing to foreign audiences. Good Irish comedies which rise above the level of farce are surprisingly few, when one considers the strong literary movement of the past generation and at the same time the superb materials for a native comedy. Irish wit and repartee are not altogether mythical, and the love of pungent metaphor is perhaps not so strong in any other people.

No modern comedies are more joyous than those of Lennox Robinson, whose earlier plays, however, ranged from grim melodrama to political tragedy—the latter a popular Irish subject always. Robinson was born in 1886 near Cork, the son of a Church of Ireland clergyman. His formal education was inconsiderable, although he was a voracious if haphazard reader. His devotion to the theater dates from his first visit to a playhouse at the age of sixteen. In an article he wrote for *T. P.'s and Cassell's Weekly* for February 6, 1926, he says: "One hot summer afternoon I saw a performance by the Abbey Theater Company. A little later I turned a story of my sister's into a one-act play and sent it to that theater, amazingly it was accepted. . . . a longer play was written and played six months later, and, being the first realistic Irish peasant play, made a small stir." He was sent by Yeats to London to observe the management and direction of a notable repertory theater producing plays by Shaw, Galsworthy, Barrie, and Barker, and after a period of practical training he returned to the Abbey Theater as its manager and producer. For many years he has been almost continuously associated with the Abbey Theater, either as manager or director. He is a novelist as well as playwright.

Under Robinson's management the Abbey Theater has more and more come to resemble the English Repertory Theater, largely because he belongs to that Irish group whose spiritual home is in England. He is closer to Barker and Shaw than to Yeats and Synge, although not so "emancipated" as St. John Ervine and Shaw. He is a genuine realist, unconcerned with Irish fairy tales and folk-lore. His better plays are *Harvest* (1910), a

thesis play dealing with rural education, *Patriots* (1912), a poignant tragedy of political life, *The Whiteheaded Boy* (1916), his most popular play, a good-humored satire, *Crabbed Age and Youth* (1922), a masterpiece of high comedy, declared by some critics to be the best one-act play of our age, *The Big House* (1926), a serious, searching study of the fate in the new Ireland of the professional and land-owning classes *The Far-off Hills* (1928) is a successful attempt to recapture the tang and verve of *The Whiteheaded Boy*, and has been a great favorite with English and American audiences on the Abbey Players' recent tours *Is Life Worth Living* (1933) is an amusing comedy showing the devastating—even suicidal—effects a summer repertoire of grim Scandinavian plays has on a small Irish community

The Far-off Hills is a sunny comedy which through sheer exuberance constantly threatens to topple over into farce. But it is a comedy of character, in fact, the plot is almost too light to be called a plot, but it moves quietly with amusing dialogue and no forcing of the comic pace. *The Far-off Hills* belongs more to the theater than to the library. To appreciate its fine tang and glow one must hear Susie's infectious laughter, watch the three old cronies badgered by the genteel Marian, feel the rush of Pierce, and observe those unforgettable Dickensian *miserables*, Ellen and Harold, lugubriously at ease in their slough of despond. This simple comedy without thesis or problem has by its sheer gaiety and intelligent humor found a permanent place in the growing repertoire of fine Irish plays. It is refreshingly free from the euphuistic artiness which oppresses too many Irish plays.

THE FAR-OFF HILLS

ACT I

The dining-room at the CLANCYS' A comfortable, unpretentious room It is Sunday night, after supper, the three CLANCY girls are clearing the table, their father, PATRICK, is still sitting at it The eldest girl, MARIAN, is about twenty-two years old, her dress is markedly plain and dark, DOROTHEA—just past seventeen—and ANNA—a year younger—are quite gaily dressed Their father is a man of fifty

MARIAN [*directing operations*] Those spoons are clean, they can go on the sideboard That's Father's glass, he'll want that

PATRICK I've dropped my handkerchief Could you find it for me, Pet?

PET [*otherwise ANNA*] Here it is

MARIAN Take those flowers out, Anna, they're withered And put on a kettle of water I suppose Ellen isn't in yet

PET Not likely She's a date with Donough to-night

[*She goes out with the flowers*]

PATRICK Are you there, Ducky?

DUCKY [*otherwise DOROTHEA*] Yes, Daddy

PATRICK Get me my stick, like a good child

DUCKY Here you are

MARIAN [*having completed pling a tray*] Take that to the kitchen, Dorothea Gently! Goodness' sake, you'll drop the whole thing I'll open the door [*She gets DUCKY safely out, shuts the door, takes whatever remains on the table—napkins, clean silver, etc., and puts them on the sideboard Then, to her father*] Come, dear, I'll get you to the fire

PATRICK All right [*He rises, groping with his stick MARIAN slips her arm into his*] Don't bother, I can manage I know the way by this time

MARIAN Better be sure than sorry [*She guides him across the room and to a comfortable chair by the fire He settles into it and sighs deeply*] [*Folding up the table-cloth*] Such a sigh! What ails you?

There's not a word out of you the whole evening

PATRICK I'm feeling a bit low in my mind, Marian, and that's the truth

MARIAN Why so?

PATRICK Coming out of Mass this morning I was speaking to Oliver O'Shaughnessy, telling me he was of a man he met yesterday who had a cataract for fifteen years and it's not ripe to operate on yet Fifteen years! That's a terrible long time, Marian Mine's only seven or eight years old—only three since I knew it was a cataract—but it seems a lifetime

MARIAN Well, indeed I wish Oliver would keep such news to himself Sure, didn't Doctor O'Grady say you were going on grandly, and that you could be operated on in another six or eight months?

PATRICK He did, but them cataracts are terribly uncertain It might be that the operation would be a failure and I'd go blind altogether Do you remember that awful bit in the papers a week or two ago about the man who blew his brains out on account of losing his sight? Dick was reading it to me It's making me feel an old man, this groping about in dimness and darkness, and it's on my mind all the time the way I'm standing in your way and tying you down here Sometimes I think I'd be better dead, better by lying along with your mother in Kilmore

MARIAN [*laughing*] Such ulagoning! To hear you any one would think I was trying to get a husband and losing my looks on account of you Thank God they don't care at the convent how I look, and anyway, if you had the eyes of a hawk itself I couldn't go in there till the children are educated, and that won't be for another year or so

PATRICK You're a good girl, Marian, what would we do without you? Dick Delany was saying to-day what an awful hardship it was on you not to have gone into the convent years ago

MARIAN Well, you can tell Dick Delany to mind his own business [*She comes and sits near him*] And now look, Father I want to speak seriously to you In a

year's time, with the blessing of God, you'll be seeing as well as you ever saw and I'll be free to take my vows You'll be here in the house with the two children, they'll be nearly grown up, they'll be maybe thinking of marriage, and you must be very careful what class of people you let come into the house Do you see?

PATRICK You mean I must encourage likely young fellows?

MARIAN I don't want you to encourage any one in particular, but there's some I want to discourage You mustn't let the riff-raff of the town be here day in day out

PATRICK Riff-raff?

MARIAN Oliver O'Shaughnessy and Dick Delany

PATRICK [*a little indignantly*] They're not riff-raff They're old friends of mine, two decent, honest men

MARIAN They never did a day's work in their lives

PATRICK Sure why should they? Haven't they, each of them, their little bit of property?

MARIAN They're always drinking

PATRICK No one ever saw them drunk

MARIAN They're forever at races and coursing matches and reading low papers and telling bad stories

PATRICK Ah, what harm? They wouldn't hurt a fly

MARIAN Father, you can't really think they're fit company for two young girls like Dorothea and Anna?

PATRICK Well, the children have a great grab for them And they're not likely to want to marry either of them Two old bachelors!

MARIAN But they'll give this house a low name They mustn't come here so often, Father, I've made up my mind to that

PATRICK They're about the only company I have now

MARIAN Well, you must have them less often or have them outside Sometimes when I think how this house is likely to go to pieces when I'm out of it, I feel that maybe God wants me to stay and look after it

PATRICK No, no I wouldn't for anything in the world stand between you and the convent I'll try and behave myself I'll give Oliver and Dick a hint not to come here so often I mustn't do anything that might spoil the chances of Pet and Ducky

MARIAN You and your Pets and

Duckys! I suppose you'll never remember, Father, that they were christened Anna and Dorothea?

PATRICK A pair of damned consequential names

MARIAN The names of two saints, Father Saint Anna—she was the mother of the Blessed Virgin, and Saint Dorothea—she was a virgin martyr and her tomb is in Rome

PATRICK Anna was named after your mother's mother, a malignant old woman And Dorothea after an aunt of my own in the hopes she'd leave her the bit of money But it all went in masses, bad luck to her

MARIAN You shouldn't say a thing like that, Father I wish to goodness you'd called *me* by a saint's name

PATRICK You were called after a woman your mother took a great fancy to, a woman in a book Your mother used to be reading it the months before you were born "Marian Halcombe," it's often she repeated the name, and the book was "The Woman in White"

MARIAN Well, I'll have a new name, a saint's name, when I'm a nun And now I'll read to you a bit But you won't forget about giving Oliver and Dick the cold shoulder?

PATRICK I'll remember

MARIAN It's for your good I'm speaking—and for the children's good I'll get the paper

[*She rises and goes to a side-table*]

PATRICK Ah, don't bother about the reading

MARIAN No bother at all It wouldn't be Sunday night if you hadn't your reading, and Harold, I suppose, will be here soon, so the quicker we begin the better [*She comes back with the Observer*] What would you like to hear about?

PATRICK What paper have you?

MARIAN The *Observer*, of course

[*PATRICK sighs*]

MARIAN Isn't it a wonder, Father, you never heard of the *Observer*, till I started to get it for you

PATRICK Oh, I had heard of it

MARIAN There's this Mr Squire writing about Doctor Johnson—the man who wrote the dictionary, you know—that ought to be very interesting Will I begin with that? You can stop me if you don't like it

PATRICK Oh yes, anything at all

MARIAN "The Great Lexicographer"—that's what it's called

PATRICK Lexicographer? What the hell is that?

MARIAN We'll find out as we go along That's what I like about the *Observer*, we always learn something from it [*Starting to read*] "The Great Lexicographer" —

[*A knock on the hall door is heard*]
MARIAN Who can that be? It's a bit early for Harold

PATRICK [*a little cheerfully*] It mightn't be Harold, it might be —

MARIAN Who?

PATRICK I dunno

MARIAN Ellen isn't in yet, I'll make the children open the door and send Harold into the garden for half an hour [*She goes to the door, opens it and listens*] Oh, they've opened the door I declare it sounds like Oliver O'Shaughnessy's voice Isn't that a great bother now? Perhaps I'd better see him The children might let him in

PATRICK But—but he might have an important message for me

MARIAN What message could Oliver have? That's Dick Delany's voice with him I'll hunt them

PATRICK But—but, Marian, I think they want to see me

MARIAN I've no doubt they do But they won't Sunday night and all

PATRICK Marian, it will be awful to turn them from the door

MARIAN What's awful about it? 'Tisn't as if you had asked them up

PATRICK Well, in a way I did

MARIAN You did?

PATRICK At Mass this morning —

MARIAN Oh, this comes of letting you go to late Mass with Anna and Dorothea

PATRICK I didn't exactly ask them, but—and you hadn't told me then that you were so set against them

MARIAN You've known this long time what I think of them But I suppose they must come in since you've asked them and they're here

PATRICK We could go into my little room We'd be no trouble to any one there

MARIAN You'll stay here What a botheration And we were going to have such a nice evening over the paper

PATRICK [*cheerfully*] Yes, but that's all off now And—and Marian, what about a little drop of something to drink?

MARIAN There's whisky in the decanter and plenty of soda and glasses

PATRICK How much whisky, Marian?

MARIAN Enough

PATRICK I see

MARIAN They're coming

[*She goes to the side-board and brings to the table a decanter, syphon, and glasses*]
OLIVER O'SHAUGHNESSY and DICK DELANY come in, followed by DUCKY and PET All have been laughing and talking The two men are hearty middle-aged men, a little younger than PATRICK OLIVER is a stronger person than DICK]

OLIVER and DICK Good evening Marian

MARIAN Good evening

OLIVER Here we are, Paddy

DICK We took you at your word

PATRICK I'm delighted you've come, boys Sit down

OLIVER [*going to sit the other side of the fire*] Am I taking your chair, Marian?

MARIAN No

DICK [*sitting beside PATRICK*] I'll camp here

OLIVER I've been making Ducky and Pet laugh at the story of how old Mossy Burke found himself engaged to the widow DUCKY It's a killing story, Daddy

PET I split my sides laughing Poor old Mossy!

MARIAN [*to PET*] What about your practising, dear?

PET I'm sick practising

MARIAN You'd better do twenty minutes' scales Sister Mary Bridget says your scales are terribly weak

PET Oh, Marian!

OLIVER Sunday night, too!

MARIAN Yes, the poor child Isn't it hard on her? Run along, Anna [*ANNA is going*] It's very important for her to get that scholarship And this poor child has to work at her book-keeping Come along, Dorothea [*She links her arm in DUCKY'S and is going out*] I'll be back in a few minutes, Father [*The three girls go*]

PATRICK [*in a whisper*] Is she gone?

OLIVER She is

PATRICK [*with relief*] Ah! Now tell me, did they find the body?

OLIVER They did

DICK Cut up into small pieces and in the governess's trunk

PATRICK For goodness' sake! Is that a fact?

DICK True as gospel

OLIVER When he was arrested he turned very pale —

DICK But protested that he was innocent, and the sergeant —

PATRICK When who was arrested?

OLIVER Huntingdon

DICK The rabbit-farmer Surely to God, man, you know that much

PATRICK I know nothing Not a thing since you gave me the news on Friday I got Ducky to search the *Observer* this afternoon, but there wasn't a word about it in the whole bloody paper

OLIVER And do you mean to say you don't know about the Luton mystery? That's better again than the governess thing

PATRICK Not a syllable

DICK Oh, the Luton thing is grand A double murder Have you the paper on you, Oliver?

OLIVER I have [*He pulls out a disreputable Sunday newspaper*] There's a picture of Huntingdon and a map of the rabbit-farm The cross marks where the knife was found

PATRICK I wish I could see it Before we begin, boys, help yourselves Marian left the drink on the table, I think

DICK Right [*He goes to the table, his face falls when he sees the contents of the decanter*] Hm!

PATRICK Isn't it there?

DICK Oh yes, it is there Singular number

PATRICK What do you mean? Hurry up or she'll be back

DICK [*fetching decanter and glass*] How much will you have?

PATRICK A stiff one Talking of murders always makes me a bit dry [*DICK gives him a good glass of whisky, which empties the decanter*] I get you, Dick You mean there's not enough drink for the three of us But Marian swore there was She—what'll I do?

DICK Don't worry, Paddy I brought a drop with me—in case Sure we all know Marian's a bit strait with the liquor

PATRICK [*very distressed*] You make me feel ashamed And when I think of the old days before I got so blind and helpless—

OLIVER Ay, indeed, those were the times But don't fret yourself In a short while, please God, you'll be walking round as brisk as a bee and as keen as a hawk

PATRICK I wouldn't mind if she wasn't such a damned good girl Think of the way she's looked after us since the poor mother died Sure, she's been mother herself to Ducky and Pet and never a rumble out of her, though her heart's away the whole time with the nuns at Mount Vincent

DICK [*who has taken a large flask out of his pocket and is now distributing drinks*] Well, sure Pet and Ducky are nearly grown up now, she can skip off with

herself to Mount Vincent before the end of the year

PATRICK She swears she won't leave me till the operation is well over, and God knows that might be years away

OLIVER Heaven forbid! Here's to you, Paddy! [*He drinks*] I often thought it a pity Marian wouldn't get married I mean, if she had some fine young fellow breaking his heart about her and she breaking her heart for him, I bet you she'd throw you and the children overboard, and you'd all then have an easier life But of course the Church will wait, there's no fear of the Church jilting her—God forgive me if I'm saying anything disrespectful Poor Marian, she's a grand girl really, 'tis a pity she takes everything so seriously

DICK Yes, indeed God forgive me, but I hate to think of her a nun I'd like to see her well married

PATRICK She's never looked at a boy Since she's been a child she's been all for the nuns And the only man who might want to marry her is Harold Mahony—and what good is he?

OLIVER Oh, devil a bit I think it's the blessing of Providence to have him the way he is—tied up to a wife in the asylum 'Twould be awful to have the like of him free to marry again and maybe rear up a long family as lugubrious as himself

PATRICK God help him, 'tis enough to make any man dismal to have his wife go mad on him on the honeymoon

OLIVER Ah, it's eight years ago He should be over it by this Talking of honeymoons, did you see the queer case in to-day's paper?

DICK The poor fellow that was drowned at Aberystwyth?

OLIVER Drowned? My dear man, don't you believe it That clothes-on-the-shore trick is an old game Believe you me, the honeymoon wasn't all it ought to have been and he decided to cut his losses

PATRICK For goodness' sake!

DICK I think 'twas just a common drowning

OLIVER Then who was the strange man seen boarding the train at midnight at a little station two miles out from Aberystwyth? Answer me that

PATRICK Whisht! There's voices She's coming back We'll try and slip away to my little room And listen, boys you mustn't stay too long to-night—I'll tell you why later Hide the paper

OLIVER Right, right

[*He clumsily stuffs the paper into his pocket* MARIAN comes in with

SUSIE TYNAN and PIERCE HEGARTY SUSIE is a pleasant-looking woman of about forty, PIERCE an energetic young man of twenty-two]

MARIAN Here's Susie, Father, and she's brought her nephew with her

SUSIE My poor sister Francey's son You remember Francey, Patrick, who married Hegarty the cattleman in Cork?

PATRICK I do, of course

SUSIE And I think you saw Pierce once before when he was a baby Shake hands with him, Pierce

PATRICK [*shaking hands*] How do you do? You'll excuse me not getting up He seems a fine young man, Susie There's a good grip in his hand

SUSIE He is a fine young man, Patrick, and a clever one into the bargain And, Pierce, that's Mr O'Shaughnessy, and that's Dick Delany—two of the biggest ruffians in the town

OLIVER You're very hard on us, Susie

SUSIE I know you You can't throw dust in my eyes

PIERCE I've met both these gentlemen before

SUSIE Where?

PIERCE Mallow Races, Shelbourne Park, The Maze, and Delahunty's bar here two nights ago

SUSIE The villains!

MARIAN Sit down, Susie Won't you take a chair, Mr Hegarty?

PIERCE Thank you, Miss Clancy

[*They all sit*]

SUSIE You know, Patrick, it makes me feel an old woman to have a grown-up nephew

PATRICK Indeed you're not old, Susie, sure your sister was years older than you SUSIE She was, of course All the same

OLIVER Your aunt is one of the ornaments of our little town

SUSIE Go on out of that! Praise from you is a great compliment indeed Where are the girls, Marian?

MARIAN Dorothea is working at her book-keeping and Anna is practising

SUSIE Practising? I thought I heard a jangle of scales as you let us in the front door Sure it's hardly Christian to be playing scales on a Sunday evening Fetch them down, for goodness' sake I want them to meet Pierce

MARIAN I think they should be left to their work, Susie

SUSIE Ah, nonsense! Pierce is dying to see them Aren't you, Pierce?

PIERCE Sure

SUSIE If you won't get them, I'll get them myself

MARIAN Very well

[*She goes out PIERCE politely opens the door for her*]

PATRICK Will you excuse us, Susie, if we go into my little room? We'll only be a check on the young people if we stay here and—and we've a bit of business to talk over, haven't we, Oliver?

OLIVER To be sure About that—about that little matter

DICK And it's very important to get it settled to-night

SUSIE Oh, off with you [*The men start to go, OLIVER guiding PATRICK*] Don't forget your flask, Dick [*He retrieves it from the chair he has left it on*] You'd better take the syphon with you, it will be a great assistance to you in settling that little "bit of business" I see, Oliver, you've that low Sunday rag in your pocket

OLIVER How well you recognize it

SUSIE Oh, Pierce was reading it to me all the afternoon Don't spill the precious liquor, Dick Well, you're the pretty trio! [*She gets them out of the room and shuts the door*] Those are the two nicest, idlest men in Glencarrig

PIERCE And Mr Clancy?

SUSIE Oh, Paddy has a heart of gold He's the best friend I have in the town Poor man, 'tis the wretched life he has now, nearly blind and Marian is a little tight with him But she's a good girl, maybe too good Here are the other girls now

[*MARIAN, DUCKY, and PET come in*]

SUSIE This is Ducky and this is Pet [*They shake hands*] Didn't I tell you, Pierce, that there was no lack of pretty girls in this town? And isn't he a fine young man, girls, though he is my nephew?

PIERCE I take after you, Aunt Susie

MARIAN Sit down, all of you Where's Father?

SUSIE Oh, need you ask? Gone into his little room with his cronies and tumbler of whisky and newspapers full of murders They'll be there all night talking gossip and slander—God bless them

MARIAN I hate those two being so much around the place

SUSIE Ay, my dear, they're your father's old friends, and God knows he couldn't have too many friends just now

MARIAN But they're—ah well, never mind Are you making a long stay Mr Hegarty?

PIERCE I hope so, Miss Clancy

SUSIE It's a great secret, girls, but he's going to set up for himself here. Since my poor sister Francey died he's got no one, and so he's coming to live with me.

PET Oh, isn't that lovely!

DUCKY Susie's got the nicest house in the town and a grand garden.

PET And a tennis-ground.

DUCKY And a conservatory.

PET It's a lovely house for a dance.

PIERCE Do you like dancing?

PET Oh, I dote on it. But we're very backward here. I don't know all the new steps.

PIERCE Will you let me teach you?

PET Oh, will you? You'd be a dote if you did.

MARIAN Are you setting up in business here, Mr Hegarty?

PIERCE Sure. A garage, taxis, char-a-bancs, 'buses.

MARIAN The people are very quiet here. Though we're not forty miles from Dublin we're quite off the track. I'm afraid you won't do much business.

PIERCE They won't be quiet long. I'm a rouser. I've bought Boland's place. Bought it at ten o'clock last night.

MARIAN Bought Boland's, that big place? How long are you here?

PIERCE Since Thursday night. I'm afraid I'm a bit of a rusher, but I always know my own mind and Boland's suits me. As I'm going to run up a picture-theater in the vacant lot beside it.

PET [*with a sigh of ecstasy*] Oh!

DUCKY Won't that be grand!

PET We're blue-moldy here, Mr Hegarty.

PIERCE You don't look it.

PET We are. The people here have ivy growing on them.

MARIAN I don't agree with you, Anna. We have a lot of entertainments, Mr Hegarty—of a quiet kind. We have a Shakespeare Society; not many towns in Ireland the size of Glencarrig have a Shakespeare Society, and we have a public reading once a year in the Assembly Rooms—not in costume, of course.

PIERCE Good. I'll get up plays. I've done a lot of that. You'll all have to act.

[*DUCKY and PET groan with delight*]

PIERCE I think it's a fascinating little town, it only wants stirring up.

MARIAN It's a very pretty town, don't you think? The river—and the spire of the chapel—have you noticed them?

PIERCE Surely.

SUSIE They look lovely from your garden, Marian.

MARIAN Yes, we've one of the nicest views in the place.

PIERCE I wish you'd show it to me.

MARIAN I will some time.

PIERCE Why not now?

MARIAN Now?

PIERCE Yes.

MARIAN It's getting rather dark.

PIERCE The spire will look stunning against the sunset.

MARIAN Ah, it lies to the east.

PIERCE Exactly. The light will just fall on it.

MARIAN You could see it to-morrow.

PIERCE I may be dead to-morrow.

MARIAN Very well. Excuse me for five minutes, Susie. Will you come, Mr Hegarty?

PIERCE Sure.

[*He opens the door for her*]

MARIAN [*as she goes out*] The garden is rather a mass of weeds, I'm afraid, but you see my father's health—

[*They disappear*]

SUSIE Well, girls, what do you think of him?

PET He's a dote, Susie.

DUCKY And not a trace of a Cork accent.

PET I hate the Cork accent, 'tis very low.

SUSIE I'd like to see any nephew of mine attempting to have a Cork accent. As a matter of fact, he's lived there very little.

PET Where's he been?

SUSIE All over the place. My brother-in-law died when he was only fifteen—that's seven years ago—and there he was left to look after his mother. Well, he knuckled to, did this thing and that, and everything he touched turned to gold. He ran a cinema, he ran a chocolate factory, he ran greyhounds. Greyhounds and chocolates—everything was first past the post. He's enough money now to buy Boland's, and he has a couple of thousand in the bank besides. He's like an American—in-deed he was in the States for eight months.

PET And his mother's dead?

SUSIE He's a bird-alone. But I think he'll settle down here now. He'll love getting hold of a quiet little town like this and making it hum.

PET You know when he said that just now about the picture-house—I thought maybe he'd have me to play the piano in it.

DUCKY And I could be his secretary. He'd want a secretary, wouldn't he, Susie?

SUSIE Of course he would. But I thought, Pet, you were going to win scholarships and be a first-class piano-player?

PET Oh, that's all Marian and her plans
God bless you, Susie, for delivering me
from them scales to-night

DUCKY You shouldn't say "them," it's
"those"

PET Ah, shut up Does this suit you
better? "Those damned scales"

SUSIE Pet!

DUCKY It's no use shouting at us, Susie
We're fed up Marian's making life hell
SUSIE Ducky! Such language!

DUCKY I'm not cursing and swearing
There is a place called hell

PET And this house is it

SUSIE You must make allowances for
Marian

DUCKY and PET We do

SUSIE And that she's very fond of you
and your father

PET We know all that, but it's come
to this that we can't bear her being fond
of us any longer, and we've a great plan—
will I tell her, Ducky?

DUCKY Yes

PET Well, maybe you'll think us very
interfering, Susie, and of course it's—well,
in a way, it's your own business entirely,
and we wouldn't make the suggestion only
we love you terribly and we love father,
too and—and—you tell her, Ducky

DUCKY Well, you see it's like this Now
you mustn't be surprised at what I'm going
to say or angry or anything like that But
—but you see mother died more than ten
years ago

PET We were only little children, we
hardly remember her

DUCKY And—and you see Marian
ought to go into the convent, and she won't
go as long as father is the way he is and
—and—tell her, Pet

PET Well—well—you see how it is,
Susie

SUSIE I don't

PET We love you terribly

DUCKY You've said that before

PET I know I have Tell her yourself

DUCKY [*desperately and rapidly*] We
think 'twould be grand if you'd marry
Father There!

[*SUSIE goes into a fit of laughter*]

PET It's nothing to laugh about

DUCKY Maybe you don't like him, but
you go on about him as if you did

SUSIE So it's a stepmother you want?

DUCKY Yes

SUSIE Well, I've often heard of girls
hating the idea of a stepmother, this is the
first time I've heard of girls begging for
one

DUCKY Maybe the other girls hadn't a

sister like Marian or a stepmother like
yourself

PET Go on, be a dote, marry him

DUCKY You'll never regret it

PET He's terribly easy to get on with

DUCKY He's very little in the house

PET You wouldn't see him from break-
fast to dark

DUCKY He doesn't drink—just a glass
now and again with Olver and Dick

PET He doesn't bet or gamble, an odd
game of whist is all he ever plays

DUCKY For ha'penny points

SUSIE [*laughing*] Stop, for goodness'
sake, or I'll split my sides Are you serious
in this?

PET and DUCKY We are

SUSIE Well, I'll be serious too I'm very
fond of your father, and I think he's fond
of me—in fact I know he is

DUCKY How do you know?

SUSIE Something he began to say one
time, three years ago, we were walking up
the Rocky Road, then Marian came round
the corner—

PET She would

SUSIE And he broke off, but I knew
he'd return to the subject again if he got
the chance

PET And didn't he get the chance?

SUSIE My dears, the very next day was
the first time he went to Doctor O'Grady's
about his eyes, and of course once he knew
he was in for cataract it was good-bye to
love-making

DUCKY Why so?

SUSIE Well, Ducky, your father is a
very scrupulous man I don't think he'd
consider it fair to ask any one to marry
him in his present condition

PET Would you marry him the way
he is?

SUSIE I would

PET Couldn't you ask him to marry
you?

SUSIE Pet! Such a suggestion!

PET Well, you could sort of lead him
on, you know

SUSIE I don't

PET Oh, Susie!

DUCKY Will I speak to him for you?

SUSIE You'll do nothing of the kind

DUCKY What'll we do then? We must
do something

SUSIE Let things take their course
Leave it to God

PET Sure we've been leaving it to Him
these years and years

SUSIE Ssh! Isn't that a knock?

PET It's sure to be Harold If it is, for
goodness' sake come out into the garden,

Susie, and we'll send Marian in to him. Run and open the door, Ducky. [*DUCKY goes*] Isn't it awful to have that Harold coming here every Sunday night with his long face and his sort of tombstone manner?

SUSIE Poor Harold. Coming here to chat with Marian is about the only diversion he has.

PET He spoils every Sunday night. His being here drives me to bed before my time.

SUSIE He has a great feeling for Marian.

PET Well, I wish her joy of him. He's a lovely beau for any girl to have. I'm not surprised his wife went mad. Any girl would have to be a bit cracked to marry him. Here he is.

[*HAROLD comes in. Indeed he is a sad young man.*]

HAROLD [*shaking hands*] Good evening, Miss Tynan.

SUSIE Good evening, Harold.

HAROLD [*shaking hands*] Good evening, Pet.

PET 'Evening.

SUSIE Won't you sit down, Harold? [*He sits*] Lovely weather, isn't it?

HAROLD Yes, but the evenings are closing in, we're drawing very near the winter.

SUSIE Oh come! We're only just into September.

HAROLD The twelfth—no, to-day's the thirteenth. Yes, the thirteenth of September. A few more weeks and winter is with us again.

SUSIE I often think the nicest weather of the year comes in October.

HAROLD Do you? Yes, sometimes we used to have a fine October, long ago.

SUSIE The *Mail* says we're going to have grand weather next month.

HAROLD I wouldn't believe in that.

PET What did you do with Ducky?

HAROLD She went into the garden to tell Marian I had come.

PET [*to SUSIE*] Look at her, trying to steal a march on me. Come on, Susie. We're going into the garden, Harold. There's a grand new young man there, Susie's nephew.

HAROLD I met him yesterday.

SUSIE Isn't he a fine young man, Harold?

HAROLD He seemed very lively.

SUSIE Well, he's young.

HAROLD Yes, let him enjoy it while he can.

PET We'll hurry Marian in to you. Come, Susie.

[*They go out. HAROLD, left alone, sighs a little and wanders about the room. He notes the empty decanter, shakes his head sadly and murmurs, "He's drinking again." MARIAN comes in.*]

MARIAN I hope I haven't kept you waiting, Harold? [*She shakes hands*] Sit down.

HAROLD I can't stay long. The cob is lame. It's too damp for you to be in the garden at this hour, the mist from the river is dangerous.

MARIAN It's a lovely evening.

HAROLD Yes. One doesn't notice the dampness, but next day—rheumatism, neuralgia, bronchitis perhaps.

MARIAN I was showing Mr. Hegarty the view across the river.

HAROLD That's Miss Tynan's nephew? Do you like him?

MARIAN No. A horrid young man. All push and hustle.

HAROLD Yes. That was the opinion I formed of him. [*A silence*]

MARIAN Well, is there any news? I haven't seen you since last Sunday.

HAROLD No news, I think. Except that my orchard was robbed.

MARIAN Well, isn't that a shame?

HAROLD It always is—every year. Except last year.

MARIAN All the orchards in the place are robbed. You were lucky to escape last year.

HAROLD But I had no apples last year. My whole place is going to rack and ruin. The house is filthy.

MARIAN I don't think it's as bad as you make out. Mary Hennessy looks after you pretty well.

HAROLD Ah, no, it's not like a home—but how could it be? I sit alone there in the evenings over an empty grate or a dying fire and it gets darker and darker, darker and darker.

MARIAN Well, of course it does.

HAROLD And I think of my ruined life and—and I think of you, Marian.

MARIAN Now, Harold, I've told you often enough to put thoughts like that out of your head. Apart from everything else it isn't right, it's a sin. You're a married man still, it's a sin for you to be thinking of any other woman.

HAROLD I know, but I can't help it.

MARIAN Oh yes, you can.

HAROLD And I know, too, that you don't care a bit for me.

MARIAN I'm very fond of you, Harold, but not that way.

HAROLD You're a sort of a saint,

Marian I don't think it can be much of a sin to be in love with a saint

MARIAN Oh, I'm not quite a saint yet Let's talk of something else How's the farm? Have you your oats saved?

HAROLD Yes

MARIAN That's good

HAROLD But such a light crop, hardly worth the saving

MARIAN Oats are light everywhere this year, there'll be a good price for it

HAROLD So I've been told, but I doubt it I was wondering would you and your father come out some day this week—Wednesday, say

MARIAN We would, to be sure Father always enjoys the little drive

HAROLD I'd send the trap for you, but I'm sure the cob will be dead lame by Wednesday

MARIAN Oh, we'll borrow a car

HAROLD Come about tea-time [*He hiccups*] Excuse me

MARIAN And ask Mary Hennessy to make those lovely little hot cakes They're delicious

HAROLD Do you really like them? I always think she puts in too much soda—so indigestible [*He hiccups*] There—I've a hiccup I knew I felt something coming on I'd better go

MARIAN Sure you've only just come Stay and have a cup of tea Don't mind the hiccup, I know you're liable to them Hold your breath

HAROLD I'd better go Really I only came in to fix up about Wednesday With the lameness of the cob I suppose we'll take the best part of an hour getting home, and Dan Mulcahy's driving He'll want to get back to his supper and his wife and children

[From now till he goes he hiccups from time to time very gently]

MARIAN Oh, let Dan wait for once

HAROLD I couldn't, Marian I think I ought to go [*He rises*]

MARIAN Well, I know you're the most obstinate man once you make up your mind to a thing Won't you even see Father before you go?

HAROLD Where is he?

MARIAN In the little room with Oliver and Dick

HAROLD Oliver and Dick? Ah, no How are the eyes?

MARIAN Worse Of course we must expect that The quicker the sight goes the sooner the operation

HAROLD As long as it doesn't go too

quickly Ah well, I hope the operation will turn out well, I hope it will

[PIERCE comes in]

PIERCE I have to fly, Miss Clancy I've a lot to do to-night, estimates to draw up and all that sort of thing Aunt Susie is staying behind Good evening, Mr Mahony

HAROLD Good evening

PIERCE Ripping weather, isn't it? Well, good night, Miss Clancy, I hope I'll see you soon again

MARIAN Good night

HAROLD Good night, Marian Don't forget Wednesday if it's fine—but it looks like a change

MARIAN We'll come wet or fine, I warn you Good night

PIERCE Are you buzzing, too? You're very short and sweet

HAROLD Am I?

PIERCE Even shorter and sweeter than I am [*HAROLD stalks out*] I say, did I get his goat saying that?

MARIAN You mean—offend him?

PIERCE Yes

MARIAN He never takes offense He's very gentle

PIERCE He's not exactly a natural comic, is he? Still, that hiccup's rather pet But it takes all sorts, as they say Do you know, Miss Clancy, I'm going to love this place, "dote" on it—isn't that Pet's word? Aunt Susie's a topper, the people seem all decent and nice, I bought Boland's for a song—there's only one fly in the ointment MARIAN What is that?

PIERCE Your sisters tell me you're going to be a nun

MARIAN What difference on earth can that make to you?

PIERCE Oh, one pretty girl less in a small place like Glencarrig is a very serious matter

MARIAN Well—really—

PIERCE Shouldn't I have said that? I'm sorry I'd better evaporate before I say something worse Good night See you soon

[And he dashes out]

MARIAN Goodness gracious How I hate that sort of young man

[But she drifts to a mirror and does something to her hair She hears voices outside and stops The door opens, OLIVER and DICK are guiding PATRICK back, she is behind the door and they don't see her]

OLIVER Are you all right now?

PATRICK I'm as right as rain, boys

DICK Good night

PATRICK Good night It was kind of you to look in

OLIVER Not at all The inquest's to-morrow There'll probably be a good account of it in Tuesday's *Mail*

PATRICK Will you come up Tuesday night so?

OLIVER and DICK We will

PATRICK And bring the paper

DICK Certainly

OLIVER I bet there'll be a lot of developments in that Luton case, too We'll be off Come, Dick [They go]

MARIAN [coming forward] I'm here, Father Take my arm

[She steers him to his chair]

PATRICK I hunted them, Marian, I hunted them I remembered what you said and I hunted them

MARIAN But I heard you asking them for Tuesday

PATRICK Oh, did you?

MARIAN I might as well say nothing, for all you care

PATRICK That's not true

MARIAN You pay no attention to me, I'm only wasting my breath

PATRICK I can't give up my old friends altogether

MARIAN I'll speak to them myself

PATRICK You'll do nothing of the sort

MARIAN I will You can't stop me

[There is an obstinate silence MARIAN lights a lamp]

MARIAN Will I read to you?

PATRICK No

MARIAN I'd like to That bit about Doctor Johnson—

PATRICK I don't care a thraneen about Doctor Johnson An old bags, that's all he was

[Another silence SUSIE and the girls come back]

SUSIE Pierce had to go, Marian Did he see you before he went? I suppose I should be pushing off, too

PATRICK You'll not go yet For the love of God, Susie, sit down and talk to me for a bit

MARIAN Yes do It's time you were thinking of bed, girls

PET Sure it's not half-past nine

MARIAN Twenty to ten And you'll have to be up at seven, as you missed your book-keeping and your scales to-night Off with you

DUCKY Oh, Marian!

MARIAN No delaying now And no reading in bed, mind

DUCKY Good night, Daddy

[She kisses him]

PATRICK Good night, Ducky

PET Good night, Daddy

[She kisses him]

PATRICK Sleep well, Pet

DUCKY 'Night, Susie You see it is hell

PET Don't forget what we said, Susie And there's no time like the present

[They kiss her and go out followed by MARIAN]

PATRICK [after a pause] I'm annoyed, Susie, I'm annoyed

SUSIE Why so?

PATRICK My house had always a name on it for hospitality, hadn't it?

SUSIE To be sure

PATRICK It was a place where my friends would always find a welcome and a good drop of liquor and a good cigar, wasn't it?

SUSIE It was

PATRICK There are no cigars now because Marian says a blind man can't get enjoyment out of tobacco, there's never more than a weeshy dram of whisky so that my friends come to see me with flasks in their pockets, there's no welcome for them, they feel intruders I was forced to ask Oliver and Dick to go away to-night before they'd been half an hour in the house I was disgraced here to-night, Susie

SUSIE Ah, not at all

PATRICK I felt near crying when Dick whipped out his flask

SUSIE What matter?

PATRICK It does matter, Susie It hurts me more than I can say And now she threatens to talk to them herself, forbid them the house

SUSIE I think it's preying more and more on her mind that she can't go and be a nun

PATRICK I wish the nuns joy of her She's trying to make this place a sort of convent She's giving Ducky and Pet the hell of a life

SUSIE That's the very word they used to me to-night

PATRICK Did they? Dear, dear! And they're the best little girls that ever stepped She's breaking their spirit

SUSIE I wouldn't say it's altogether broken yet Still they'd be happier if she was out of it

PATRICK But how can she go? Sure I'm getting more helpless every day

SUSIE If you had a—housekeeper

PATRICK I couldn't bear a strange woman around me

SUSIE Oh well, she needn't be altogether a stranger

PATRICK You're thinking of some old one like Nellie Daly?

SUSIE I wasn't exactly thinking of Nellie

PATRICK Who have you in your mind then?

SUSIE Oh, there's others besides Nellie

PATRICK I don't know who they are Katie Burke? You wouldn't want me to have the like of her

SUSIE I wouldn't let her inside the house the girls were telling me of the walk they had this afternoon

PATRICK Were they?

SUSIE Yes They walked up the Rocky Road

PATRICK Did they

SUSIE I don't know when I was that way last—not for ages

PATRICK I can tell you one time you were there A May evening along with myself

SUSIE Was I?

PATRICK Have you forgotten?

SUSIE I think—I'm beginning to remember

PATRICK Do you remember Marian coming round the corner?

SUSIE I think I do

PATRICK Ah, Susie, if she hadn't—

SUSIE Yes, Paddy?

PATRICK If she hadn't—oh, never mind

SUSIE If Marian hadn't come—what, Paddy?

PATRICK Nothing

SUSIE We're such old friends, Paddy, that I'll tell you what would have happened if Marian hadn't come round the corner You'd have asked me to marry you

PATRICK *[in a low voice]* I would

SUSIE And I'd have said yes

PATRICK Would you, Susie, would you? I'm glad to know that, though it's too late now Maybe God sent Marian that day If he hadn't, you'd been tied up now with a blind old man

SUSIE I'm going to be tied up in a week or ten days

PATRICK What? What are you saying?

SUSIE I'm going to be married

PATRICK You're—? Who is it? Who's the damned—? Who is he?

SUSIE Yourself, Paddy *[He is too astonished to speak]* Of course, if you've changed your mind since that day on the Rocky Road, say so and that's an end to it

PATRICK *[feebly protesting]* I'm old, I'm nearly blind, if the operation goes against me I'll be stone-blind

SUSIE You're only pushing fifty, I'll be forty next month There's not a deal to choose between us in age

PATRICK You're ready to marry a blind man?

SUSIE I'm ready to marry you

PATRICK Susie, my dear Susie Oh, God bless you, Susie, I could cry

SUSIE You're a dreadful foolish man, Paddy

PATRICK Give me your hand, Susie my dear I suppose I'm too old for kissing and romancing, but I'll do this anyway

[He gropes for her hand, finds it and kisses it courteously]

SUSIE *[half crying]* Don't, Paddy, don't It's as if—as if you were making out I'm something wonderful, and I'm not It's you that are wonderful

[She strokes his hand]

PATRICK We'll have the grand times, won't we, Susie?

SUSIE We will

PATRICK And you'll look after me till I get my sight, and Marian will be free to go into the convent?

SUSIE Yes

PATRICK But the children—what will they say?

SUSIE What can they say?

PATRICK It will be a great blow to them, a stepmother coming in on top of them I'll have to break it to them very gently

SUSIE I think maybe I'd better do that

PATRICK Do you think they'd take it better from you? It'll be a terrible surprise to them

SUSIE It will Leave them to me, Paddy You tell Marian

PATRICK All right But break it to them very gently One good thing is, Marian will be delighted, we're pleasing one person besides ourselves, thank God

[MARIAN comes in with three cups of tea on a tray]

MARIAN I made you a cup of tea, Susie

SUSIE Thank you, dear

[She takes it and spills a little]

MARIAN Your hand is shaking What ails you, Susie?

SUSIE Oh, nothing Nothing at all

MARIAN You're looking funny Are you not feeling well?

SUSIE I'm feeling grand

MARIAN Here's your tea, Father

PATRICK Leave it on the table I'll have it later

SUSIE I think—I think I'll run up to the children for a minute There's a little bit of news I want to give them You

know what it is, Patrick, you can be telling Marian

[*She goes out quickly, leaving the door open*]

MARIAN [*getting up to shut it*] Wisha, poor old Susie It's a pity she never got married, isn't it, Father?

PATRICK Ay

MARIAN She's quite settling down into an old maid Her nephew makes her seem quite an old woman

PATRICK Does he? The jackanapes

MARIAN What was her news anyway?

PATRICK Sit down beside me, I'll tell you

MARIAN [*sitting*] Well? You seem very solemn over it

PATRICK It's good news, Marian, the best you could hear It's—Susie and I—we're—going to—be married!

[*Before MARIAN can recover from her astonishment and speak, the curtain falls*]

ACT II

The girls' bedroom A simple, pretty room with two beds in it The beds lie side by side, their ends towards the audience A small table is between them and a chair There is a lighted lamp on the table, and by its light DUCKY is lying in bed reading PET, before a mirror in her nightdress, is brushing her hair

PET Once Marian goes into the convent, I'm going up to Dublin to get a real Eton crop

DUCKY [*deep in her book*] H'm!

PET And I'm going into pajamas—biscuit-colored ones I hate these stuffy nightdresses

DUCKY I'm going to stick to nightdresses and I'm going to let my hair grow You must look ahead

PET I don't believe long hair is coming back as quick as that

DUCKY Sure, God alone knows what the fashions will be by the time Marian is out of this Maybe we'll be back to skirts with trails and leg-of-mutton sleeves

PET I have hopes of Susie

DUCKY I haven't

PET I felt to-night there was something in the air I think Daddy is a bit fed up with things I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he asked her to-night to marry him Didn't you hear him asking her to stay and talk to him?

DUCKY There's nothing in that Susie's

a wash-out All this silly wait-till-you're-asked business!

PET She's the only one who stands up to Marian Did you see the beastly way Marian collared Pierce to-night and made him go off with her to the garden?

DUCKY I saw it Rotten I know he'd far rather have stayed and talked to us But that's her game, always A spoil-sport, that's what she is

PET And of course, as she's going to be a nun, the men feel completely safe It's really an awful handicap to us to have a sister going into a convent We never get a look-in Look at Charlie and Willy and Maurice O'Callaghan—they stick to Marian all the time, we can't get in a word edge-ways

DUCKY True for you If she doesn't go into the convent soon, we'll die old maids

PET It's awful And the dear Lord knows what they see in her, she's got a decent sort of a skin, not too bad a figure and nice hair, but that's about all And the way she dresses—! She looks half a nun already

DUCKY Oliver O'Shaughnessy took my breath away the other day saying how nice-looking she was I think the man's demented

PET And Dick raving another time about her cleverness I'd like him to be living in the same house with her for a month and he'd change his tune [*She gazes in the mirror*] I wish to God I had a different class of a nose!

DUCKY What sort do you want?

PET I'm not sure Any sort would be better than this Ah sure, forget it, child, forget it!

[*She blows out the candles on the dressing-table, kicks off her slippers and makes for bed*]

DUCKY Have you said your prayers?

PET Mind your own business [*She settles into bed*] I do think he's rather attractive

DUCKY Who?

PET The cat

DUCKY I suppose you mean Mr Hegarty

PET I mean Pierce He was calling me "Pet" before he'd finished Did he call you "Ducky"?

DUCKY No

PET Ah-ha!

DUCKY You're welcome to him

PET Sour grapes

DUCKY Go to sleep I want to read

PET Marian will catch you What's the old book?

DUCKY Never mind

PET Some cheap, romantical nonsense, I'll be bound

DUCKY It's not It's "The First Violin," by Jessie Fothergill

PET I know it Tripe!

DUCKY It's not

PET Put it up against "The Long Long Trail" and where is it?

DUCKY All right No one's asking you to read it

[A silence PET starts to laugh]

DUCKY What ails you?

PET Mossy Burke and the widow

DUCKY Oh, wasn't it killing?

PET Could she have him up for breach? Will he really have to marry her?

DUCKY Oliver said he would

PET The unfortunate poor man!

[They both laugh until the beds shake]

DUCKY Ssh! There's a step [They listen] It's Ellen going up to her room Let's have her in I'm dying to know how she got on this evening

PET Oh yes Let's call her

PET and DUCKY [chanting in chorus]

Ellen! Ellen! Ellen! Ellen!

[ELLEN appears A buxom servant, not in her first bloom She is dressed for out-of-doors]

ELLEN What do you want?

DUCKY Come in a minute [ELLEN does so] Shut the door [She shuts it]

ELLEN What is it?

DUCKY How did you get on to-night? [ELLEN is silent] Ah, go on Tell us

ELLEN Too curious you are

PET Go on You always tell us Sit down here Did Donough turn up? Did you meet him?

ELLEN I did

[But she doesn't enlarge on the subject]

PET After Benediction, I suppose?

ELLEN Yes

DUCKY Did you walk up the river as you said you would?

ELLEN We did

PET Ah, for goodness' sake, Ellen, don't be so close in yourself Sit down and tell us What sort of an evening had you?

ELLEN [with a sniff] I've a toothache

PET [sitting up in bed] Ducky, she's done it again! Oh, Ellen, Ellen, after all we said to you!

ELLEN [half crying] I know, I know

PET Who is it this time?

ELLEN A grand young fellow I saw in the Chapel—Mrs Moriarty's nephew's cousin I believe he is—Clarence his name

is Isn't that a grand name? And what was Donough compared to him?

PET So you chucked Donough?

ELLEN At the waterfall I gave him the push, and we've parted forever

DUCKY Oh, Ellen! Isn't that the thing since Christmas?

ELLEN It is

DUCKY You've a right to be ashamed of yourself

ELLEN I know, I know

PET Did you give him back the ring?

ELLEN Of course

PET Tch, tch! And we warned you, and we told you to be careful And Donough was so steady and so nice, and a day will come, Ellen, when you'll have run through all the men in the town, and you'll be getting old and you'll think then of all the chances you've thrown away and of our warnings But 'twill be too late!

ELLEN [desperately] I know, I know But what can I do? I was wild about Donough till I got engaged to him—I was wild about all the others If I could only get married quick 'twould be all right, but while I'm waiting to be married some one else sails across my path and I think what a fool I'd be to tie myself for life to the man at my side And oh, if you could see Clarence! He's lovely, and a couple of years younger than Donough

DUCKY Have you spoken to him?

ELLEN Not yet But I'm promised an intro' for to-morrow night

PET Tch, tch! You're hopeless, Ellen There's no use talking to you

ELLEN Not the least good in the world It's what my poor father used to be saying—"Tis the far-off hills are green"

DUCKY And I suppose Clarence is the greenest yet?

ELLEN He is so

PET You'll be engaged to him in a week and you'll jilt him in favor of some other will-o'-the-wisp

ELLEN I suppose so

DUCKY And you're getting quicker and quicker A year or two ago you'd stick to one man for six months or more But now—three men since Christmas! I don't know what's going to become of you

ELLEN I'm awful I know I am

[She puts her hand to her cheek]

PET Don't expect us to pity you for the toothache It's your own fault

ELLEN I don't know how it is, but love always flies to me teeth Every tooth in my head is aching I won't sleep a wink to-night

DUCKY Serve you right Look here

make it up with Donough to-morrow and let Clarence go his road

ELLEN I couldn't If you could see him! He was dressed in dark navy, and that lovely sort of sleek shiny hair

DUCKY He sounds awful common

ELLEN He's grand Wonderful! Romantic!

PET Ah, nonsense

ELLEN With a sort of sad, far-away look in his eyes

PET Oh, Ellen

ELLEN And a little halt in his step I suppose he did wonders in some war or other I'll go and take off my hat now and make a sup of tea for the master and Miss Marian

DUCKY Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

ELLEN I am I wish I was dead—only for Clarence Good night to you

[*She goes out*]

PET Wasn't she a caution?

DUCKY [*meditatively*] "The far-off hills are green" I suppose there's something in that saying Things seem grand—until we have them

PET How do you mean?

DUCKY Maybe when Marian goes into the convent things won't be as good for us as we think they'll be, and maybe the convent won't be all Marian expects

PET Ah, give over your sermonizing I'm going to sleep

DUCKY Good night so

PET If Marian sees the light of that lamp she'll have your life

DUCKY Let her I don't care Ellen's disturbed me I couldn't sleep And I'm just at the bit in the book when everything's going wrong

PET Skip on to the last page and see if they marry

DUCKY No, no I couldn't do that

[*There is a tap at the door*]

PET There's Marian Now you're caught

DUCKY I don't care Come in

SUSIE [*putting her head in*] Are you asleep, girls?

PET Not a bit of us Come in, Susie

SUSIE [*coming in*] I didn't want to go home without having a word with you

PET Sit in here between us Wait, I'll move the lamp

[*She puts it on the dressing-table SUSIE sits between the two beds*]

DUCKY What's happening below, Susie?

SUSIE Marian's talking to your father!

PET Any fear of her coming up?

SUSIE Not a bit, I think

PET Thank God Well, Susie?

SUSIE Well what?

PET You know Anything doing? Any news?

SUSIE Oh! [*She begins to laugh*]

DUCKY What are you laughing at?

[*SUSIE goes on laughing*]

PET [*in excitement*] She's done it, Ducky! I believe she's done it!

DUCKY Have you, Susie? Have you?

SUSIE I—

[*She goes off again into a fit of laughter*]

PET [*jumping till the bed shakes*] She's done it! she's done it! she's done it!

DUCKY She has! She has! She has! Oh, have you, Susie?

SUSIE I've come up to break something to you

DUCKY Break? Merciful God, Pet, she's after refusing him!

PET Not at all She'd never dare face us if she had

SUSIE Your father says I must break it to you

PET Ah, give over your breaks Tell us first, yes or no, are you going to marry him?

SUSIE I am

PET Susie! You're a dote!

[*She flings herself out of bed and embraces her*]

DUCKY [*hopping out of bed too*] Oh, Susie!

SUSIE Into bed the two of you You'll get your deaths

PET Not a death She's going to marry my father! She's going to marry my father! [*She prouettes round the room*]

SUSIE Have conduct, Pet Suppose Marian was to come in

PET Ah, let her

[*But the girls get back into their beds*]

DUCKY It seems too good to be true How did you bring it about?

SUSIE Oh, I did nothing to bring it about

PET You were saying you'd leave it to God Did you, Susie?

SUSIE Yes

DUCKY I don't believe it

PET Did you sort of lead him on the way I advised you?

SUSIE Not at all He took the bit between his teeth, there was no holding him

DUCKY and PET Glory! Imagine Father!

DUCKY How does he feel over it? Is he wild out with delight?

SUSIE He's very pleased with himself But he's thinking maybe you two will take it badly

DUCKY Badly?

PET The creature!

SUSIE I'm here to break the news very gently to you and to ask you to forgive him

PET Tch, tch! Well, aren't men very simple?

SUSIE Much you know about them

PET I know that much Oh, Susie, I'd love to have heard it I suppose you'll never tell us what really happened?

SUSIE Never

DUCKY When'll you be married, Susie?

SUSIE I don't know We didn't get on to that Marian came in with tea

PET Is he telling her now?

SUSIE I suppose so

DUCKY She'll be dying down with daylight

PET She can go off to Mount Vincent now, there's nothing to stop her Oh, Susie, you will be married soon, won't you?

SUSIE The sooner the better as far as I'm concerned

PET Will you have bridesmaids, Susie?

SUSIE At my age? Have sense, Pet

DUCKY Oh, for God's sake, don't go in for one of them quiet weddings Sure, what's the use of a wedding unless it's plastered over with bridesmaids and rice and champagne and jollification?

PET We could be bridesmaids and Pierce could be the best man

DUCKY And you could leave for the honeymoon in Pierce's motor-car to catch the boat at Dun Laoghaire "The honeymoon will be spent on the Continent"—that always reads well

PET What sort of a going-away dress will you have?

DUCKY Pale brown, Susie, and a small rose-colored hat I adore rose and brown

SUSIE Do you know, girls, I've not given one of those things a thought yet

PET You haven't!

SUSIE No

PET Glory! Isn't that extraordinary? I suppose you're thinking—you're just thinking of Daddy?

SUSIE Yes

PET [sobered] Well!

DUCKY [sobered] I'm awfully glad about this, Susie I am indeed There's nothing I'd like better

PET Nor I

SUSIE I know, I know You're two darling girls I'll try and be good to you, I'll do my best by you

PET We're easy to manage, Susie, we are indeed But we must be led, not driven

SUSIE I see

DUCKY We want a bit of humoring I mean, there's times when I'm not inclined for book-keeping and shorthand and all that, and then it's no use forcing me

SUSIE I see

PET And you mustn't be always at me about scales

SUSIE Sure I don't care if I never hear another scale in my life

PET That's the best news yet You're a dote, Susie

SUSIE Whisht! That's the tap of your daddy's stick

[They are silent PATRICK and MARIAN come in, PATRICK is rather solemn MARIAN a little excited]

SUSIE Sit here, Patrick

[He sits between the beds]

PATRICK My dear children! Susie has told you?

PET and DUCKY She has

PATRICK You'll have to forgive me I know that no one can ever again be the same to you as your poor mother, but in a little while you'll be out in the world, and Marian, of course, will be gone from us and I'd be very lonely Susie and I have been good friends this many and a long year and—and you'll have to forgive your selfish old father

PET and DUCKY We do

PATRICK Of course I know all this is a terrible surprise to you, the last thing in the world you could ever expect to happen

DUCKY It took my breath away

PET You could have knocked me down with a feather when Susie broke the news

PATRICK I know I know You're good little girls to take it so well One grand thing is, it'll free Marian I won't be standing between her and the convent any longer

DUCKY Isn't that splendid!

PET Aren't you delighted, Marian?

MARIAN I am indeed But I feel sort of bewildered at the suddenness of it all I haven't kissed you, Susie, I haven't wished you all the happiness in the world [She rises, goes to her and kisses her] God bless you, Susie May the two of you be very happy

SUSIE Thank you, Marian

[MARIAN goes back to her place]

PATRICK To-morrow you could go and see the Mother Superior in Mount Vincent, couldn't you, Marian?

MARIAN The Mother Superior?

PATRICK She'd tell you how soon you'd be likely to be able to begin

PET I suppose you could be off in a week or ten days

MARIAN Week or ten days? [*Smiling sedately*] I can hardly get off as quick as that Of course I'll have to wait and see Father's operation well over

PET What?

DUCKY Marian!

PATRICK Sure, won't Susie be able to look after that job?

MARIAN It wouldn't be nice, Father, to expect her to do the like of that before she was married to you

PATRICK But—but—sure, Susie, you'll marry me, won't you, without waiting for the operation?

SUSIE I will, to be sure, Patrick I'll marry you next week if you like

PET Hurrah!

MARIAN Oh I didn't understand that I thought, of course, the whole thing depended on how the operation turned out

PATRICK Not at all

DUCKY Susie doesn't mind a little thing like that, do you, Susie?

SUSIE Not a bit in the world

MARIAN I see I see That's very good of you, Susie But I don't think it's fair to ask it of you

SUSIE Why not?

MARIAN Well, I'd like Father to get married with his eyes open

SUSIE That's rather a queer thing to say, Marian

MARIAN I don't mean it in any queer way When I'm in the convent there isn't any one in the world I'd prefer before yourself to be with Father All I mean is, that I don't like that idea of your marrying him and he half blind What will people say?

PATRICK Well then, I don't care a damn what people say I want to marry Susie and she's ready to marry me, blind and all, and that's all that matters

MARIAN I see I think it's rash

PATRICK Of course it is All marriages are rash

PET They'd be no fun if they weren't

MARIAN And then it's so awkward your nephew being with you now

SUSIE What's awkward about it?

MARIAN Of course you'll live at your place, won't you, till the children are educated and I'm out of this?

SUSIE, PET and DUCKY What? What? What d'you mean?

PATRICK What are you talking about, Marian?

MARIAN There's so little room here, Father, and Susie, of course, will like to

have a house to herself She's been accustomed to that for years This place won't be a real home for the two of you till the children and I are out of it

PATRICK But won't the nuns take you in at once?

MARIAN I suppose they would But I must think of the children I couldn't go till they're educated and out in the world

PET Till we're educated?

DUCKY Do you mean to say you're not going into the convent right away?

MARIAN How can I?

PET What's stopping you?

MARIAN You—and Dorothea

PET How am I stopping you?

MARIAN Your practising Who's to look after that if I'm not here? Susie hates the sound of a piano

SUSIE I do not But I hate scales

MARIAN And Anna's scales are the important thing at the moment Sister Mary Bridget says that if she doesn't—

PET Oh, shut up about Sister Mary Bridget Look, I will, Marian, I promise I'll practise two hours every day, I will, Marian, I will indeed

MARIAN [*smiling maternally*] I couldn't trust you And Dorothea's book-keeping!

DUCKY I'll work my fingers to the bone I'll take correspondence classes

[*MARIAN, smiling, shakes her head*]

PATRICK We'd all help to keep their nose to the grindstone, Marian

MARIAN I'm sure you would at first, Father, but it wouldn't last long You're too soft with them And I must think of the children before everything, before the convent even But if you're really set on marrying Susie at once, maybe Susie could take you in at her place—if her nephew wasn't too much in the way

SUSIE Oh, it's a big house Pierce would be no bother

MARIAN 'Twould be only for a year or two, Susie

DUCKY A year or two!

[*PET groans*]

SUSIE What do you say, Patrick?

PATRICK I'd be very content at your place, Susie You've a grand lovely house After all, I've no feeling for this house, we're only in it a matter of five years

SUSIE Very well so I think that's a good idea of yours, Marian Your father and I will get married as soon as can be—very quietly—and he'll come up and live at my place I'll be able to make him very comfortable up there

PET [*with a wail*] Susie, are you deserting us?

SUSIE Not at all I'll only be the other end of the road

DUCKY You're thinking of nothing in the world but your own happiness

PET And after all you owe us

SUSIE I don't owe you a thing

PET Oh, Susie! And it was our idea

SUSIE What was?

DUCKY If we hadn't told you to lead him on—

PET And not to go on leaving it to God—

SUSIE Shut your mouths the pair of you Don't mind them, Patrick They're getting a little too free and easy in themselves Marian's right, they want a firmer hand over them than yours or mine

PATRICK I don't know in the world what they're saying

SUSIE It's as well you shouldn't

PET [*to DUCKY*] She's deserted us She's gone over to the other side—lock, stock, and barrel

DUCKY She has God forgive you, Susie

SUSIE He will

MARIAN Well, is all that settled, Father? You'll marry Susie whenever you like and go up to her place, and I'll stay on here with the girls?

PATRICK That suits me all right

SUSIE A most satisfactory conclusion I don't think anything could have turned out better

PET [*wildly*] No, no, no! It's wicked of us to be standing between Marian and her vocation, it's not fair to us to ask us to do such a thing, is it, Ducky?

DUCKY [*solemnly*] I couldn't endure it, Father, I could never endure it It would come between me and my work I'd never get a long tot right knowing that I was keeping Marian from Mount Vincent!

PATRICK Dear, dear I don't know what to say, 'tis difficult to please every one I want to do what's right by you all, I don't want to think too much of what I want myself I think it's for Marian to decide, she has the clearest head of any one here

MARIAN Well, I'm content with the arrangement I wouldn't like, Father, to go away yet, not till the children are out in the world It's as if God had laid a task on me when mother died, and it would be shirking it to throw it up until it was finished A few years more in this house—what are they?—not so very much I'll stay, I'll look after the children, I'll do

my duty by them That's settled now and no more words about it

[*PET and DUCKY groan*]

PATRICK You're a good girl, Marian God bless you

SUSIE I wouldn't doubt you

MARIAN I'm sure I'm doing the right thing It's as if—as if God wasn't ready for me yet

[*There is a knock at the door*]

MARIAN Who can that be? Come in

ELLEN [*putting her head in*] Mr Mahony's back again!

MARIAN Harold? What for?

ELLEN I dunno But he's wanting to see you—very particularly

MARIAN I'll go down Is he in the dining-room?

ELLEN I left him in the hall

MARIAN Bring him into the dining-room and make some more tea

ELLEN I will not I'm going to bed Me teeth are raging [*She goes*]

MARIAN What on earth can Harold want at this hour? I'll have to go down

SUSIE We'll all go [*She rises*] Good night, girls

PET I'll never forgive you

SUSIE That won't come between me and my night's rest

MARIAN Come, Father

PATRICK [*rising*] Good night, children I've got you the best stepmother in the world

DUCKY So you think

[*There is a knock at the door*]

MARIAN Come in

HAROLD [*outside, not opening the door*] It's me—Harold!

MARIAN I know Come in

HAROLD [*opening a crack of the door*] Ellen told me to come up I've—I've got something to tell you

MARIAN [*going to the door and opening it wide*] For goodness' sake, don't be so shy, Harold The children are in bed, but what matter?

HAROLD [*coming in unwillingly*] I have some news for you

MARIAN And we have some for you Most exciting news We'll have it with our tea

HAROLD I don't want any tea I'd rather tell you now

MARIAN Yes What is it?

[*He doesn't speak*]

PATRICK Has anything happened, Harold?

SUSIE Is it bad news?

HAROLD Driving out of town—I met Doctor O'Grady—

MARIAN Yes—yes——?
 HAROLD He was looking for me, to give me a message

MARIAN Who from?

HAROLD The—the asylum!

SUSIE About your wife?

HAROLD Yes, about Molly—poor Molly [*He stops, unable to go on*]

PATRICK I hope it was good news he brought you, Harold

HAROLD Maybe the best, the best for Molly, anyway She's—she died this afternoon, quite suddenly, the doctor at the asylum telephoned to Doctor O'Grady and asked him to give me the message, being Sunday there were no telegrams

MARIAN Oh, Harold!

PATRICK God rest her soul!

SUSIE The poor creature!

HAROLD I thought I'd like you to know at once, you're the best friends I have I'll—I'll go home now My poor little Molly

[*He breaks down, he stumbles toward the door*]

MARIAN [*going to him*] Harold!

[*They both go out*]

SUSIE Well, well, isn't that a terrible thing? Poor Molly Molloy! I remember well the day she got married and how gay she was, and to think that it was all to end like this

PATRICK The poor little girl! And how pretty she was But there was always a mad streak in those Molloyes from Ballysilla

SUSIE There was Her own father warned Harold against it Eight long years she's been shut up

PATRICK And I believe never a chance of her getting better Look at it how you will, 'tis a merciful release

SUSIE Harold will feel strange now, free after all these years God knows 'twas an unnatural way for him to be, married and yet single as it were

PATRICK God help him, you'd have to pity him

SUSIE Maybe I'd better go after him Perhaps he'd spend the night at my place instead of going out to his own lonely house

PATRICK Yes, indeed 'Twould be kind of you, Susie, to make him spend the night in town

SUSIE Pierce would be company for him—he's very cheery I'll go Good night, children

PET and DUCKY Good night

PATRICK Give me a hand to my room, Susie

SUSIE Come on

[*She guides him to the door*]

PATRICK Good night, girls

PET and DUCKY Good night, Daddy

[*PATRICK and SUSIE go out*]

DUCKY My God, isn't that an awful thing?

PET The poor man! Didn't he look deathly pale?

DUCKY Marriage is a great lottery after all

PET It is indeed I don't think I could ever venture Ah, I could, I suppose

DUCKY Do you think there's any fear of this scaring Daddy and Susie?

PET Why should it?

DUCKY Suppose Susie went mad on the honeymoon

PET Not a fear of it Didn't you hear her saying there was always a mad streak in those Molloyes? There was never a wild strain in the Tynans

DUCKY I hope you're right Anyway, as far as we're concerned, what good is the marriage?

PET Oh, no good at all We're worse off than we were before As long as Father was here there was some one to stand between us and Marian, now we've nothing

DUCKY How long was this she said?

PET A year or two

DUCKY A year or two! That's a lifetime!

PET I'll run away

DUCKY You'll be caught

PET I won't I'll change my name I'll live in Dublin or New York I'll become very famous

DUCKY How?

PET I'm not sure

DUCKY Where'll you get the money?

PET I have some saved and I'm certain I could coax a pound out of Daddy Maybe I'll win the sweep at the convent bazaar—I dreamed I had the winning number—then I'd be independent for life

DUCKY I'll stick on here, sure I don't want to live anywhere but here I'd be content if only Marian was out of it Ssh! Some one's coming

MARIAN [*opening the door*] Father! Oh, where is he?

PET Gone to his bed He got Susie to give him a hand to his door

MARIAN How early he's gone

PET I think he's worn out Getting engaged at his age must be very trying

DUCKY Has Harold gone?

MARIAN Yes, with Susie

DUCKY Such a night as it's been all round!

PET Marriages —

DUCKY And deaths —

PET Daddy engaged —

DUCKY Poor Molly Mahony dead —

PET Susie's nephew arrived —

DUCKY Ellen's engagement off—ah, Marian, isn't life a checkered patchwork after all? I often lie here and wonder is it worth going on with

MARIAN [*busying herself tidying the room, putting the girls' clothes away*] What nonsense, Ducky Too many romantic novels you're reading There's nothing much to grieve about in Molly Mahony's death She was a burden to herself and a burden to poor Harold Now he's a free man

PET Yes indeed, free to marry again

MARIAN Marry again? Oh, he'll hardly do that

PET Why not?

MARIAN Well—indeed, as you say, why not?

DUCKY I'd never have the nerve

PET The nerve for what? Marry Harold?

DUCKY I mean, if I was Harold and one wife went mad on me I'd never chance another

PET If I was passionately in love I'd chance anything

MARIAN Her going mad had nothing to do with Harold

DUCKY I wonder!

PET Sure he's enough to drive any one daft

MARIAN You're two silly little girls and don't know what you're talking about Harold Mahony's a most intelligent young man and comes of most respectable people, his family have been in the place for generations, his uncle on the mother's side was a bishop

PET A bishop? I never heard that

MARIAN In America—but he's dead The Mahonys themselves were always great people for the Church, there are two cousins and an uncle priests in Connaught

PET 'Tis a pity Harold himself didn't go for a priest

DUCKY He'd preach grand dismal sermons

MARIAN Well, he was the only son and he had the place to look forward to, a nice farm just the right size, neither too big nor too small The house is old, to be sure, but it's large and well-built—none of your modern ramshackle things—and the garden is grand, if he'd only put a few strands of barbed wire on the walls I

don't think Harold's likely to marry again, but if the fancy took him no young woman could afford to turn him down lightly

PET Maybe you're right You can have him, Ducky, I'll stick to my old love—Pierce!

MARIAN That same Pierce is no addition to the place, I wish he'd settled anywhere but here But, girls, I don't like you to be forever talking of men and marriage You are too young entirely for that sort of thing You shouldn't have a thought beyond your lessons There'll be plenty of time later on for thinking of marriage and the like Do you see?

PET and DUCKY [*meekly*] We see

MARIAN That's right It's only for your good I'm talking Good night now, I'll put out the lamp

DUCKY Leave it for five minutes I'll put it out in five minutes, Marian, I swear I will But I couldn't sleep for a bit, I feel all in a whirl after the night's doings

MARIAN Very well Now I trust you are not to keep it lighting long

DUCKY You have my word for it

[*MARIAN is going*]

PET Now that I come to think of it, Kate Moriarty always had a soft spot in her heart for Harold

MARIAN [*stopping at the door*] Kate Moriarty? Nonsense!

PET It's no nonsense at all Do you remember that party at Susie's, Ducky, a month or two ago? We were all making game of him and she said he wasn't so bad

DUCKY I remember And she got as red as red and tried to pass it off with a laugh

MARIAN Poor Kate! What nonsense! I don't mean it's nonsense for her to have a good word for Harold, but it's nonsense to think he'd ever look at her or consider her for a minute in the light of a wife

PET Why wouldn't he? They're about the one age

DUCKY And she's due to get her aunt's money, and it's well known the aunt's failing, she'll hardly see Christmas

MARIAN [*laughing*] Kate Moriarty! Such an idea!

DUCKY She's a good manager, too, she'd run the farm in great style

MARIAN Would she indeed? I grant you she can manage a few hens in a back yard, but I'd be sorry to see her turned loose on Harold's fine farm, she'd bankrupt him in two years But we're talking rubbish I know Harold better than any one in the town, and I know that he

wouldn't have Kate Moriarty if she was the last woman on earth Good night now

[*She goes*]

DUCKY [*with a sigh*] It's very hard to please Marian Cresser and crosser she's getting The way she took you up about Kate and Harold!

PET Of course in a way she's right, she does know Harold better than any one else, he comes to see her every week and talks to her for hours, and she—Ducky, I've just thought of something awful!

DUCKY What is it?

PET We all know that Harold's been dying down about Marian these years and years?

DUCKY Well, what of it?

PET What's to hinder him marrying her now?

DUCKY Sure, isn't she going to be a nun?

PET She might sacrifice herself

DUCKY Sacrifice? What do you mean?

PET The way she sacrificed herself for us to-night If he got sort of passionate about her and she took it into her head that it was her duty to look after him—

DUCKY And save him from Kate Moriarty—

PET Marian'd love to look after a big place like his

DUCKY And put barbed wire on the garden wall

PET Yes Isn't she always talking about her duty? It's come across me like a flash that she'll think it's her duty to marry him and bring him in here on the top of us

DUCKY Oh, wouldn't that be terrible? Harold as a brother-in-law! Goodness knows we've suffered enough as it is God would never do the like of that to us

PET He might

DUCKY Harold wouldn't come and live here, anyway

PET No, I've thought of something worse The two of us would be carted out to his ugly old house and we'd be stuck there in the country never seeing a soul or having a bit of life, not a sound from morning to night, only the horses neighing and the calves roaring and the ducks quacking—

DUCKY Accompanied by your scales and the scrape of my pen hour after hour Ah, 'tis an impossible thought Marian couldn't swing around like that

PET I don't feel I can trust her, not after the way she went on about Kate to-night

DUCKY If she could only become a

nun before Harold begins to look around for another wife We must pray hard for her to become a nun quick I'll make a novena about it

PET I'll make two

DUCKY You're terrible, Pet, the things you think of

PET Mark my words, that's what'll happen I've sort of second sight

DUCKY [*contemptuously*] You haven't

PET Well, mark my words, wait and see I'm going to quench the light

[*She does so*]

DUCKY I won't close an eye to-night after what you've said Ah, it's impossible She couldn't give up the convent, she couldn't, not for all the Harolds in the world

PET Mark my words Good night

DUCKY Good night

CURTAIN

ACT III

A few weeks later The dining-room again, about six o'clock in the evening The table is laid for an elaborate tea, there are six places at it The side-table has dishes of meat and sweets on it MARIAN and the two girls—the girls very smartly dressed but with aprons MARIAN as plainly dressed as ever—are putting the final touches to the table They are pulling out chairs when the curtain rises

MARIAN [*directing, as usual*] Father will sit here with Susie on his right I'll sit at the other side of Father Which of you wants to sit next Susie?

PET Where does Pierce sit?

MARIAN Oh I suppose he'll have to go beside me

PET Couldn't he sit between Ducky and me?

DUCKY Yes, let's put him there

MARIAN No, 'twouldn't be manners to put him anywhere but beside me—goodness knows, I don't want him You can sit the other side of him, Ducky, you're the elder, and then Pet between you and Susie That will be right

DUCKY I can't imagine why you don't like him, Marian

MARIAN I can't imagine why you do

PET Every one in the town likes him

MARIAN Then I don't think much of the town's taste

DUCKY What have you against him?

MARIAN I just don't like him and I never will, and that's all about it. How Susie ever came to have such a nephew—! However, I can be civil to him for one night.

PET Will I strike up the Wedding March when they come in?

MARIAN Indeed you won't—making a show of us all.

PET I'd love to, and I know it off.

DUCKY I'm sick hearing you play it. What time is it, Marian?

MARIAN Just gone six.

DUCKY Pierce swore he'd have them here on the stroke of six.

PET Don't you know very well that once Susie gets her nose into Grafton Street she'll be there till the shops shut?

MARIAN What on earth could she want to buy after the stacks of things she got for her wedding?

PET Sure she needn't buy anything, just look around and turn things over.

MARIAN [*surveying the table*] Everything's right now, I think I suppose Ellen has the kettle on?

DUCKY I think so, but she's very low in her mind. She's after having a coolness with Clarence.

MARIAN Clarence? Who's Clarence?

DUCKY Her latest boy.

MARIAN Ellen and her boys! They're none of your business, Ducky. I wish you wouldn't be talking to Ellen about things like that.

DUCKY Sure I love hearing how Ellen's campaigns are getting on. The last fella sounds like a killing chap.

MARIAN Ducky! "Fellas" and "chaps"! I wish you wouldn't be so vulgar.

DUCKY Well, we're not all going into convents like you.

MARIAN Run upstairs, both of you, and take off your aprons and wash your hands and tidy your hairs.

PET Right-o!

[*They start for the door and meet OLIVER and DICK coming in*]

DICK and OLIVER Good evening, Marian. Good evening, girls.

MARIAN [*not at all glad to see them*] Good evening.

DUCKY and PET [*delighted*] Good evening, Oliver, good evening, Dick.

DICK Has he come yet?

MARIAN No. Off with you, girls.

[*The girls go*]

OLIVER We thought we'd just drop in to give him a bit of a welcome.

MARIAN I see. They maybe won't be

here for quite a good while. Pierce took his motor to Dublin to meet them and bring them back. Goodness knows when that will be, it's not like a tram.

OLIVER I know, I know. Ah, sure, we don't mind waiting. [*He sits*]

DICK For a wonder I've nothing to do this evening. [*He sits*]

MARIAN They'll be dead tired, I'm sure. Not up for much talk or anything.

OLIVER Now don't mind us, Marian. I know what's on your mind is that we'll stay to supper and upset all your nice little arrangements, but I promise you we won't. If Dick attempts to stay I'll take him by the scruff of the neck and throw him out.

DICK Oh you will, will you?

MARIAN I don't like to seem unfriendly, but the table's so small—just holds six.

OLIVER I know, I know. My sister's the same. She'll make a meal for twenty people and think nothing of it, but if I chance to bring twenty-one, I don't hear the end of it for a week.

DICK All women are like that. My mother's ditto. But she has to know the name, age, and pedigree of every one I bring to the house—and she wants a full three days' notice of their coming.

OLIVER Does she get it?

DICK Never.

MARIAN Oh, I know you men think meals make themselves—like in the fairy stories. Ah, Oliver, like a good man, don't smoke your pipe in here.

OLIVER Sorry, Marian.

[*He puts it away*]

DICK Harold Mahony is back. I saw him in the street a few minutes ago.

MARIAN Oh, is he? I haven't seen him. How is he?

DICK Well, I wasn't speaking to him, but he didn't look much cheered up. I don't think his little trip did him any good.

OLIVER Sure Harold would hate to cheer up.

DICK He's a free man now, and I don't think a little smile would do him any great harm.

OLIVER I'll give you five bob the first day he smiles.

DICK Is that a bet?

OLIVER It is.

DICK I'll hold you to it.

MARIAN Poor Harold! he's gone through a deal. Doctor O'Grady was saying after the funeral that he should

away for a month at least But he couldn't find any one to go away with him

OLIVER I'm not surprised at that [HAROLD comes in] Oh, talk of the devil!

DICK I was just saying that I saw you were back

HAROLD Yes, I arrived this morning Good evening, Marian [He shakes hands]

MARIAN How are you, Harold?

HAROLD Good evening, Mr Delany, good evening, Mr O'Shaughnessy

OLIVER and DICK 'Evening, Harold

MARIAN Sit down, Harold [He sits] Well, how are you?

HAROLD [gloomily] Oh, I'm all right A touch of neuritis, but I suppose one must expect that

MARIAN That'll wear off now that you're home again

HAROLD I doubt it

OLIVER Where were you, Harold?

HAROLD I've been in Connemara for the last fortnight

OLIVER D'you like it?

HAROLD It's beautifully desolate

DICK I suppose it rained? Connemara's the devil for rain

HAROLD Yes, it rained every day I didn't mind

DICK No, you wouldn't Were you fishing?

HAROLD Oh no I never fish

OLIVER The nearest I ever got to Connemara was Galway Races—of course you were too late for them

HAROLD Was I? I hear your father's married, Marian

MARIAN Yes, indeed, and went off for ten days of a honeymoon But we're expecting them back to-night, any minute now They're to have tea here and then go to Susie's place They're to live there, you know

HAROLD So I heard Where did they go for the honeymoon?

MARIAN The Isle of Man

HAROLD [with a sigh] Ah!

DICK 'Tis a pity you didn't go to some place the like of that, Harold, some place that would have cheered you up a bit Them old bogs and mountains aren't the thing for you at all A bit of a band and a jolly crowd and nigger minstrels—that's what you want A touch of Blackpool would have done you all the good in the world

HAROLD Would it?

OLIVER I got a killing card from Patrick last night—was I showing it to you, Dick?

DICK You were 'Tis one of the best I ever seen

OLIVER [fishing it out of his pocket] Look, Harold, 'twill make you die laughing

HAROLD [examining it] I don't understand it

OLIVER Don't you see, that enormous porpoise of a woman—that's his wife—and the scraggy old thing, that's his mother-in-law, and—

HAROLD I understand it now [No smile lights his face] It's very vulgar [He returns it]

OLIVER I suppose it is vulgar in a way but— Here, Marian, you look at it [He hands it to her]

HAROLD Don't bother with it, Marian It's very low

MARIAN Oh, I must see it now that you've all seen it [She looks at it] Yes, it is vulgar—but it's awfully funny

[And she starts to laugh, DICK and

OLIVER joining in HAROLD sits mute]

DICK Let's have another squint at it [He gets it]

OLIVER Isn't it a terrible thing that poor Patrick can't have seen it? Susie must have chosen it for him Did you get any cards from them, Marian?

MARIAN Lots But they were all scenery

OLIVER Oh, sure scenery's no good

MARIAN How did you find things when you got home, Harold?

HAROLD Oh, just as usual The house is filthy

MARIAN Tch, tch!

HAROLD And while I was away the cat had kittens—that's the third time since Christmas

MARIAN I hope they're nice kittens

HAROLD Horrid

OLIVER Was I ever telling you, Dick, of the cat that— Oh, well, maybe it's not a story to tell before Marian Come into the garden and have a smoke, I'm famished for a pipe We'll wait there, Marian, till your father comes

MARIAN Very well

OLIVER Come on, Dick, We'll see you later, Harold [They start to go OLIVER, as they go through the door] Well, as I was going to tell you, there was an old fellow one time had a big tom-cat, and—

[The door closes on the rest of the story]

HAROLD I should be going I don't want to intrude on your party I only came in to let you know that I was back

MARIAN You wouldn't be intruding, Harold. Father is always glad to see you.

HAROLD An evening like this you'll be making merry. I won't be any addition to your party.

MARIAN Don't say that, Harold.

HAROLD It's the truth. I'm a sort of wet blanket, Marian. I know I am.

MARIAN You should try and cheer up, Harold, and put all that's past behind you. Poor Molly's at peace now and that's all over and done with, and there's no use fretting over what can't be helped.

HAROLD I know. But I keep on fretting all the same.

MARIAN You mustn't. You must start a new life for yourself now.

HAROLD What have I to live for? Memories of poor Molly, dreams of you.

MARIAN Put me out of your head.

HAROLD I can't. It's just part of the bad luck that has dogged me all my life that I should find myself in love with a girl who's going to be a nun.

MARIAN Oh, but I'm not going to be a nun, Harold.

HAROLD What? What are you saying, Marian?

MARIAN I'm not going to be a nun.

HAROLD You're not—? What's happened? Has your father stopped you? Is it on account of his marriage? Or is it the children?

MARIAN No one has stopped me—except my own common-sense.

HAROLD I don't understand. What do you mean?

MARIAN I mean, my eyes have been opened. I see now that what I called my vocation was all girlish romantic nonsense. A month in the convent would have knocked sense into me, but I don't even need that now. I pretended to myself that I was eating my heart out to be away in Mount Vincent, but I wasn't. The truth is I love managing a house and contriving and planning and making people do this thing and that thing. Sometimes I used to get a half-suspicion that life would be very dull in the convent, but then I'd think of Saint Teresa and the grand time she had reforming everything. Then there came the surprise of Father's marriage and the way was clear for me. I was miserable until I remembered the children and that I must stay and look after them. But that was only a make-up. The truth was that I couldn't bear to be anywhere that I wasn't my own mistress—and as to Saint Teresa, sure she was a great saint

and a woman in a million. All I am is a driving, managing, worldly woman.

HAROLD I'm dumbfounded! I can't believe it! How can you go back on everything now?

MARIAN I must. I'll look a fool, I suppose, but what matter? Better late than never, as they say.

HAROLD What does your father think of this?

MARIAN He doesn't know. No one knows yet, only you. I'm afraid of what the children will say, they hate me—no, they don't, but they don't like me for driving them so hard. I thought it didn't matter what they thought of me, as I'd be out of it soon and they'd live to thank me. But now, if I'm not going away—I declare I don't know what's best to be done.

HAROLD It's a terrible upset.

MARIAN It is indeed. Ah, well, I've always you to fall back on.

HAROLD Me?

MARIAN I'm very fond of you, Harold.

HAROLD You always told me you never cared for me—that way.

MARIAN Nor do I. But I might.

HAROLD I see. I think you shouldn't be in too big a hurry to give up the convent.

MARIAN Do you?

HAROLD Take your time. I expect this is a little idea of yours that will pass away—a thing of nothing.

MARIAN If you knew how contented I feel. It's as if I had had a sort of little toothache at the back of my mind all these years and now I've had the tooth out.

HAROLD I see.

MARIAN It's grand to feel free to think of—other things.

HAROLD Ay, ay.

[He gets up and walks unhappily about the room. MARIAN watches him with secret amusement.]

MARIAN *[playing with him]* Sometimes I think that the best thing I could do is marry you at once.

HAROLD *[really startled]* What?

MARIAN I like you very much and they say the surest love is the sort that comes after marriage.

HAROLD But—but I couldn't marry a woman who didn't love me.

MARIAN Well, maybe I do love you. It's very hard to tell the difference between love and like.

HAROLD It isn't. They're two entirely

different things You'd be terribly unhappy if you married me just liking me

MARIAN I can't imagine being unhappy married to you, Harold

HAROLD I've—I've not a great deal of money I couldn't give you the life you're used to, the farming went to pieces this year

MARIAN Yes, you want a capable woman at your back

HAROLD You've no idea how bad-tempered and cantankerous I am—and I get terrible black moods of depression, Marian

MARIAN I know—from living alone

HAROLD And of course, we couldn't get married for ages, it wouldn't be respectful to poor Molly

MARIAN That's a pity What I'd love would be a run-away marriage

HAROLD Marian!

MARIAN [*bursting out laughing*] You're an old silly, Harold You're as romantic and nonsensical about me as I was about the convent I never believed you were as broken-hearted about me as you made out to be, and I was right For now when there's a chance of your mending your poor heart you won't take it

HAROLD That's unfair I'm surprised, upset That's all

MARIAN You wanted me as long as you couldn't get me "The far-off hills are green"

HAROLD I'm very fond of you

MARIAN Of course you are, but you don't want to marry me

HAROLD You've no right to say that [*He hiccups*] Damn! Excuse me

MARIAN Ah, be honest, Harold Tell yourself the truth I've had courage enough to give up the convent, let you have the courage to jilt me

HAROLD [*hiccups gently from time to time*] I don't like the way you're putting it

MARIAN That's because you're so romantic! Would you rather I refused you? I will if you like Then you can tell every one and have a broken heart for the rest of your life

HAROLD You're laughing at me!

MARIAN Of course I am I wish to goodness I could make you laugh a bit at yourself I've been laughing at myself for the last ten days, and I feel a different woman

HAROLD Maybe I've been a bit of a fool

MARIAN [*cheerfully*] Of course you have A big bit

HAROLD But look at all I've been through! There was poor Molly, and you were so kind, the only friend I had And I used to look at you and think and dream and then go back to my lonely house—

MARIAN I know, and your dying fire, and the evenings getting darker and darker You're slipping into the old thing again Come on, Harold, propose to me

HAROLD No

MARIAN Go on

HAROLD I won't

MARIAN I promise I'll refuse you

HAROLD I wonder!

MARIAN Honor bright

HAROLD I couldn't trust you

MARIAN There! Out of your own mouth you're condemned Ah, go home, Harold, and get some sense

HAROLD You're very unkind

MARIAN You're a young man, the world's before you You've a nice house and a good farm—you haven't a care in the world

HAROLD Oh! Such a cruel thing to say, Marian

MARIAN I know what I'll do I'll make Oliver and Dick adopt you Three months' horse-racing and gambling and knocking about would do you all the good in the world

HAROLD [*with dignity in spite of hiccup*] I'll go home There's no use talking to you while you're in this mood

MARIAN You'll never find me in any other I'm sick of shams

HAROLD [*holding out his hand*] Good night

MARIAN [*taking it*] Good night

HAROLD In spite of everything, Marian, I'll always think of you as the only woman that—

MARIAN [*dropping his hand*] Now, now, there you're off again And I won't have that silly hand-pressing business

HAROLD I didn't

MARIAN Oh, indeed you did Force of habit, I suppose, and I'll forgive you But you must break yourself of it For it's dangerous I might get so moved that I'd suddenly throw my arms round your neck and kiss you, and then you'd have to marry me

HAROLD Oh!

[*With a last disgusted hiccup, he goes*]

MARIAN [*laughing*] Poor Harold!

[*She straightens a chair or two, goes to the door and calls*] Pet! Ducky! Are you ready?

PET'S VOICE We're coming

[A motor-horn is heard, tooting comically]

DUCKY'S VOICE They've come! they've come! That's Pierce's horn

[A rush to the hall door, a confusion of voices MARIAN stands at the dining-room door waiting PATRICK and SUSIE appear]

MARIAN [kissing him] Father darling!

PATRICK Well, Marian!

SUSIE [kissing her] Well, Marian, I brought him back safe and sound

MARIAN He's looking splendid [Helping him out of his coat] Did you enjoy yourself, Father?

PATRICK Ay, I had a splendid time, the best for years

SUSIE He went round like a two-year-old

MARIAN I wouldn't doubt him

SUSIE And I declare, Marian, he danced!

MARIAN Danced! Father!

PATRICK I did, Marian, God forgive me She made me

SUSIE I taught him a few steps And the sight doesn't matter dancing, it's enough if one of the two sees The first night in Douglas looking at the flappers going around with their eyes tight shut and their noses stuck into the fellows' chests, says I to myself, "What's to prevent Paddy and I doing the same thing?" So we did I steered him

PATRICK She did indeed All the same, I felt a bit ashamed, Marian, at my age

SUSIE Ah, nonsense! You and your age

MARIAN I don't see why you shouldn't, Father, if you like it

PATRICK I'm glad to hear you say that, Marian I thought you'd be wild with me

MARIAN As long as you enjoyed yourself, what else matters?

PATRICK Marian?

MARIAN [laughing] Oh, Father, there's a lot happened since you went away

PIERCE [appearing with the girls] I left all the bags in the car, you don't want any of them left here, do you?

SUSIE No, Pierce I have a few little things for the girls, but they'll do later

PET Oh, have you, Susie? What?

DUCKY What d'you bring me?

SUSIE I brought you a lovely what-d'you-call-it

DUCKY A what?

SUSIE Like this, you know [She makes

a vague gesture] And I brought Pet the same sort of thing, only different

PET Like what?

SUSIE Oh, you know—a thing—well you put it like that—and it's like this

[She makes vague gestures]

PET You are a tease, Susie

DUCKY We'll be up to your place to-night to root them out I won't sleep till I've seen them Did you bring us anything, Daddy?

PATRICK Yes—Douglas Rock!

DUCKY Ugh!

SUSIE What's the box in your hand, Pierce?

PIERCE Just something I got in Dublin I'll leave it here for the present

MARIAN Are you longing for your tea?

SUSIE Parched I'm tired, tramping the streets of Dublin all day

DUCKY What did you buy?

SUSIE Nothing, except a religious picture for you, Marian, I didn't see anything in Douglas that would suit you, but this is just your style

MARIAN You're very good I'll make Ellen wet the tea

SUSIE Give me a few minutes, Marian, to wash my hands I'm a mask of dust

MARIAN Take Susie upstairs, girls Oh, Father, did you see Oliver and Dick?

PATRICK No Where are they? Are they here?

MARIAN They called up to see you They went to have a smoke in the garden, Maybe they didn't hear the car come

PATRICK I'd like well to see them

MARIAN Would you step into the garden while Susie is tidying herself?

PATRICK I'd like to

MARIAN Very well But, Father, don't ask them to stay to tea, there isn't room

PATRICK I understand

MARIAN Give him a hand, Pet

PET [taking his arm] Here you are, Daddy

DUCKY Come on, Susie I have hot water and all [The four go out]

MARIAN They're both looking grand, aren't they?

PIERCE Yes [He abruptly takes up the parcel and hands it to MARIAN] That's for you

MARIAN For me? What is it? Where did it come from?

PIERCE From Dublin

MARIAN Dublin? Is it Susie's religious picture?

PIERCE No Something I got For you

MARIAN I didn't ask you to get me anything

PIERCE I know But I got it

MARIAN Well, I declare! What is it?

PIERCE A dress

MARIAN A dress? Who for?

PIERCE Yourself Who else?

MARIAN [*putting down the parcel*]

Well, I think you've got great impertinence to go buy a dress for me, and great impertinence to think for a minute that I'd take it from you You can bring it back to the shop

PIERCE You mean you won't take it?

MARIAN That's exactly what I mean

PIERCE Or even look at it?

MARIAN Or even look at it

PIERCE [*chucking the parcel across the room*] Then it can go to hell!

MARIAN Please don't use language like that here

PIERCE Oh, rot!

MARIAN Whatever made you think of such a thing, buying a dress for me?

PIERCE I hate to see you going around all dull and dowdy—like Adam's aunt You're the prettiest girl in the town

MARIAN Nonsense!

PIERCE You are, if you gave yourself half a chance You dress frowsily because you think you're going into a convent But that's all nonsense—you're not You're going to marry me

MARIAN What?

PIERCE I fell for you the first minute I saw you I'm crazy about you Say you love me, go on

MARIAN I hate you!

PIERCE Rot! Go on, say you love me

MARIAN I think you're mad

PIERCE Yes, mad about you And you are about me

MARIAN I hate you I've hated you from the first minute I saw you

PIERCE Liar! You fell for me that first Sunday night

MARIAN I didn't

PIERCE You did Look at me

MARIAN [*trying to meet his eyes*] I don't want —

PIERCE You do, you do

[*He kisses her, he has run a cinema, remember*]

MARIAN You mustn't, you mustn't

PIERCE I must, I must

[*He kisses her again*]

MARIAN The others will be back

PIERCE Let 'em I want to tell the world

MARIAN We're dreaming, aren't we?

PIERCE Not on your life I'm real Pinch me

MARIAN How could you?

PIERCE What?

MARIAN Ever care for me?

PIERCE Why not? I knew at once

MARIAN I'm plain and dull and dowdy

PIERCE Try a touch of Grafton Street It's there, in that box

MARIAN It's not only clothes

PIERCE But they make a hell of a difference Go on, be a sport, slip it on I spent an hour choosing it

MARIAN [*breaking away from him*] No, I can't I can't marry you, Pierce, it's too ridiculous

PIERCE Most sensible thing you've done in your life You're the cleverest woman in the place, I'm the smartest man Between us, we'll run the town

MARIAN Run the town!

PIERCE You're made for bigger things than chivvying Pet and Ducky Wait till you've your hands on the garage and the cinema

MARIAN [*her future dawning on her*]

Oh! I hear some one coming What'll I do?

PIERCE [*rescuing the parcel and giving it to her*] Hop upstairs and get into this

MARIAN If I come down in it, what will they say?

PIERCE They'll tumble to the fact that you're not going to be a nun, that you're going to marry me

MARIAN I made up my mind a week ago that I wasn't going to be a nun

PIERCE I know You fell for me the first minute you saw me

MARIAN I didn't

PIERCE Then why did you bring me out to look at the sunset? They're coming Fly!

MARIAN Pierce, be a darling, tell them before I come down I'd never have the courage

PIERCE I'll tell them, of course, nothing easier

[*She seizes the box and makes for the door and meets SUSIE and the girls coming in*]

SUSIE Where are you off to, Marian?

MARIAN To hurry up tea [*She goes*]

PET Well, Pierce, such goings-on you never heard

PIERCE Where? Here?

PET Nothing ever happens here In Douglas

PIERCE I wouldn't doubt Aunt Susie

SUSIE We didn't do anything so out of the way

PET Oh, didn't you? What about the evening on the esplanade, and the two men from Manchester?

SUSIE Ah, shut up about that and tell me how you got on while we were away

PET Not so bad, then Marian wasn't as bad as I expected But the awful thing is she can't stand Pierce

SUSIE Can't she?

PIERCE Are you sure?

PET Now, Pierce, there's no use shutting your eyes to the fact that she can't bear a bone in your body I must say it shows her rotten taste, but there it is Surely you must have noticed it yourself?

PIERCE Something like it

PET Of course Look, Susie, he'd be coming up every day to see Ducky and me, and he wouldn't be here three minutes before Marian would be in to hunt him

SUSIE Well, I'm surprised at Marian I can't imagine any one not liking you, Pierce

PET Ah, of course, Pierce isn't her style at all, they're like oil and water, they'd never mix

PIERCE I wouldn't go so far as to say that

PET He asked us out in the motor twice, Susie, and Marian wouldn't let us go

SUSIE She went herself, maybe?

PET Catch her! She'd rather be seen dead than with Pierce

PIERCE Well now, Pet, just to show that you're not as wise as you think you are, I have the pleasure to inform you that Marian and I—

[PATRICK and OLIVER and DICK come in]

DICK Here we are, Susie

PATRICK They wouldn't go till they'd shaken your hand, Susie

SUSIE I'm glad to see them

OLIVER How are you, Susie Tip-top?

SUSIE [shaking hands] First-class, Oliver

DICK [shaking hands] You've knocked ten years off yourself, Susie And sure Patrick looks about twenty years old

PATRICK That's all I'm feeling, Dick

OLIVER Well, marriage is a wonder By the Lord, Dick, we must think of getting married one of these days

SUSIE There's little chance of that happening

OLIVER Oh, I wouldn't say so

DICK I'm not so dead set against it as all that

SUSIE I mean, I can't imagine any one who would take you—either of you

DICK Susie!

OLIVER You never appreciated us, Susie

SUSIE I never took you at your own valuation, you mean How are the murders getting on, Oliver?

OLIVER Wisha, there's little stirring, Susie, little stirring A terrible slackness in crime at the present moment I don't know what's come to every one No one seems to want to do anything out of the common

DICK Ah, well, there was a decent little suicide in yesterday's paper—that case at Mulligar

OLIVER Ph! I wouldn't think much of that A common bankrupt

DICK I think there was more in it than bankruptcy Did you see what the aunt said when they cut down the body?

OLIVER A thing of nothing Mark my words, a thing of nothing Ah, but please goodness in a week or two things will freshen up With the end of the holidays there's generally something doing Fellas coming back stoney-broke, you know, and taking it out on their wives and the like—meaning nothing personal, Patrick

PATRICK Douglas left me without a stiver—but I'm not sure that I'm going to avenge it on Susie

SUSIE I'd like to see you try

DICK Do you remember that double murder at Wolverhampton? Holidays were at the back of that, nothing else

PIERCE Let's talk of something more cheerful I've a little bit of news for you

SUSIE What's that, Pierce?

PIERCE Oh, it's nothing very much [To his own astonishment he gets suddenly shy] It's only that Marian—I mean it's just that I—Marian—

ELLEN [putting her head in through the door—her head is swathed in a bandage] I'm off to me bed You can tell Miss Marian

PET Bed? Ellen! not before you've brought up the tea?

ELLEN You can fetch your own tea Me teeth are raging

PET You've done it again!

ELLEN [sniffing] He came—Clarence—to the back door five minutes ago, and I gave him the push for good an' all

PET And who is it this time?

ELLEN Don't ask me My heart's broken [And she goes]

PET Well, isn't she a terror? I'll have to go and give Ducky a hand

[*She goes*]

OLIVER That Ellen woman's a sort of a public scandal There'll be no peace in the town until she's married Come, Dick, we should be off

PATRICK Indeed, you'll do nothing of the kind You'll wait and have a cup of tea at least I can't see what's on the table, but I'm sure there's a good spread

SUSIE Oh, there's lashings, Patrick

PATRICK There you are!

OLIVER Ah no, I promised Marian I wouldn't stay As she says herself, the table only holds six

PATRICK Six? Many a time in the old days I saw it hold ten and more

OLIVER These aren't the old days Come, Dick

PATRICK No, no, boys Don't go My first night home and all

DICK We sort of pledged our word we wouldn't stay

OLIVER We promised

PATRICK Wisha, break your promise

OLIVER I'll tell you what—we'll drop up to Susie's place later, in a couple of hours' time Will that suit you? Will you be there by then?

PATRICK We will

OLIVER Any objection, Susie?

SUSIE Not the least in the world

PATRICK Is there anything for them to drink, Susie?

SUSIE Two bottles of J J and a bottle of port—unless Pierce has made away with them when my back was turned

PIERCE I didn't touch them

SUSIE Very well Don't insult me by bringing your flask, Dick You'll be up too, Pierce?

PIERCE I don't think so I'll stay here SUSIE With the girls? Marian will hunt you

PIERCE I don't think so You see the fact is—

[*He hesitates*]

OLIVER We'll be off so

SUSIE Don't go for a minute I've a letter I want you to post, I've been carrying it around all day I left it in my bag up in Marian's room I'll get it I won't keep you a minute

[*She goes out*]

PATRICK Sit down again, boys A woman in a thousand, that's what she is OLIVER You struck gold all right, Paddy

PATRICK I did And what did I ever do to deserve it? Pierce!

PIERCE Yes?

PATRICK I'm saying your aunt's a

woman in a thousand You should pray to God that you have the luck to marry a woman the like of her

PIERCE Yes I'd say Marian is a bit like her

OLIVER Marian? Yerra, not at all

DICK Marian's a born o'd maid

OLIVER A born nun

PATRICK Yet, boys, I wish—God forgive me—that she wasn't going into the convent

PIERCE As a matter of fact—she—that is, this evening, I—

[*The girls interrupt him by coming in with trays on which are a teapot, toast, eggs, hot cakes, etc* PIERCE helps them to put them on the table]

DUCKY Marian wasn't there to give us a hand, we had to do everything And Ellen's gone to bed with the toothache

PET Isn't love a terrible thing, Pierce?

PIERCE You've hit it, Pet

DUCKY The kettle was nearly boiled dry and the toast's as hard as a rock You'd better call Marian, Pet

[*The three men are talking in low tones among themselves* PIERCE makes a desperate effort to get their attention]

PIERCE Don't go for a minute, Pet Before Marian comes—I want— Mr Clancy, sir, I have something to tell you

OLIVER [*coming to the end of some story*] Did you ever hear better than that?

PATRICK Well, that beats Banagher!

PIERCE Mr Clancy, Mr Clancy

PATRICK Yes, yes What is it, Pierce?

PIERCE It's only to tell you that Marian—this evening—

[*He stops*]

PATRICK [*impatiently*] What's all this about Marian?

PIERCE Well, only that she—

[*Susie comes in in some agitation*]

SUSIE Such a queer thing!

OLIVER What? You've lost the letter, I suppose

SUSIE I haven't I can't get at my bag I don't know what's come to Marian, Patrick, she's locked herself into her room and she says she's not coming down to tea

PATRICK Not coming to tea?

SUSIE So she told me Through the door

OLIVER Maybe it's because we're here Did you tell her we're on the wing?

SUSIE I did It's nothing to do with you

PET She must be in love, like Ellen!

DUCKY Did she say she had the toothache?

[*They both laugh*]

SUSIE Stop your laughing I don't like it, Patrick Something strange is up Her voice sounded queer

PIERCE I'll fetch her down

[*He makes for the door*]

SUSIE Stop, Pierce She hates the sight of you, she won't listen to you and the door's locked

PIERCE I'll get her out

[*He is gone leaving the door open*]

PATRICK Susie, is anything wrong? Are you scared?

SUSIE No, Patrick, just a bit puzzled There can't be anything wrong She was all right when I was speaking to her here a while ago Hush! Listen!

[*They all listen PIERCE'S voice can be dimly heard, but not exactly what he is saying When any one speaks in the room they speak in whispers*]

DUCKY He's begging her to come out what use is that?

PET Telling her she's done nothing to be ashamed of

SUSIE What can that mean?

DUCKY He's ordering her to come out!

PET Such a way to speak to her!

SUSIE He's losing his temper No, he's not He's speaking so low now I can't hear what he's saying

OLIVER Ssh! It sounds like "darling!"

DUCKY and PET Darling?

SUSIE Ah, nonsense You're losing the use of your ears

OLIVER Ssh! "Darling" it is! There it goes again!

DICK And "sweetheart," and "baby," and—glory be to God!

SUSIE [*after a tense moment of listening, sinking into a chair*] Oh, merciful heavens!

PATRICK What was it, Susie?

PET, DUCKY and DICK What?

OLIVER I couldn't catch it

SUSIE "When we're married," he says

PET and DUCKY Susie, he didn't!

OLIVER He must be raving

SUSIE Those were his words

[*Every one is aghast with surprise*]

PIERCE'S VOICE [*loudly—he has suddenly lost his temper*] Come out! Come out at once, I tell you! You won't? I'll give you till I count three, then I smash the door One—

ALL [*under their breath*] One—

PIERCE Two—

ALL Two—

PIERCE Are you coming? [*A pause*] Three!

ALL Three! [*An instant's silence, then a fearful crash*] Oh!

PATRICK [*after a pause*] Glory be to God!

OLIVER [*in awe*] It's like something you'd read of in the papers

DICK Do you think is there any fear he'd strike her or that she'd throw vitriol in his face?

OLIVER Sure where would she get vitriol?

SUSIE It's grand grand! I wouldn't doubt Pierce Ssh! there's a step They're coming!

[*They wait in silence MARIAN and PIERCE come in She is dressed in her new dress, she looks very pretty —PIERCE has excellent taste—but she is overwhelmed with shyness She makes straight for her father and flings her arms round him*]

MARIAN Daddy, I'm sorry, but I couldn't—and—

[*She begins to cry*]

PATRICK There, there, darling, don't cry What's the matter? Did he frighten you? I won't let any one frighten my little girl

MARIAN I'm so happy, Daddy So terribly happy

PATRICK That's all right, darling, that's all right

PIERCE [*considerably ruffled as regards hair and temper*] We're going to get married, sir That's all the trouble

PATRICK [*stroking her hand*] I see, I see That's all right, doaty There's nothing to cry about in that

MARIAN Oh, Daddy, Daddy!

PATRICK Ssh, ssh!

PET [*to DUCKY*] Where did she get the lovely dress? I wouldn't know her

DUCKY And look what she's done to her hair

PIERCE I got that dress Hold your tongues, and leave your sister alone

PET Mind your own business I was never so glad of anything, Marian

[*And she kisses her*]

DUCKY [*following suit*] It's simply grand

MARIAN Thank you You're dears

SUSIE [*to PIERCE*] You're a nice one

PIERCE I am

OLIVER The young fellows going now don't lose much time

DICK They're rapid Terrible rapid

PET Won't it be lovely to have Pierce living here and helping to educate us?

PIERCE Not on your life, we'll have a house of our own, thank you

DUCKY But our education?

PIERCE It can go to the dickens, we have more important things to think of than your silly book-keeping and scales

DUCKY and PET Oh! Pierce!

PET Marian, do you hear what he says?

MARIAN Yes He's quite right I don't care if you never get educated

PET Marian!

SUSIE And meantime, the tea is getting blacker and blacker

MARIAN Yes I'm so sorry It's all my fault Come, Daddy

OLIVER We'll be off Give me your hand, Marian The best of luck to you No, dang it all, I've known you since you were a baby I'll have a kiss

DICK Well, so long as Pierce doesn't smash me in as he smashed in the door——! *[Kissing her]*

MARIAN You must neither of you think of going Sit down

OLIVER There won't be room at the table

MARIAN There'll be lots of room Get two more chairs, girls

DICK I think now we should drink a health to the engaged couple, and I chance to have a drop with me, and all

SUSIE I wouldn't doubt you

MARIAN You can keep it

[She produces a brimming decanter]

OLIVER That's a sight for sore eyes

DICK Will I hand it round?

MARIAN Yes Don't spare it

DICK I won't Trust me

[And he busies himself with the glasses]

MARIAN And that's a little present for you, Daddy

[She puts a box into his hand]

PATRICK *[feeling it]* It's—it's cigars! Is it, Marian?

MARIAN Yes

[She sits beside PIERCE]

PATRICK God bless you

DICK And now that we've something in our glasses, here's looking at you, Marian, and you too, Pierce, and may you both be ——

[The door opens HAROLD sticks his head in]

HAROLD You'll forgive the intrusion, Marian, but my umbrella—I forgot it and there's big banks of black clouds gathering in the west

DICK *[jumping up and going to him, his glass in his hand]* You're in the nick of time, Harold Take that in your hand and drink to the engaged couple

[He goes back to the table and fills another glass for himself]

HAROLD The engaged couple?

SUSIE Marian and Pierce They're going to be married

HAROLD Marian and ——! Marian going to be married? I'm delighted I'm simply delighted

[A smile of relief has begun to spread over his face, it grows broader and broader]

DICK By the holy, he's smiling I've won the bet! Five shillings, Oliver, five shillings!

OLIVER It's worth it

PATRICK This little room is as full of happiness as an egg is full of meat Marian, dear, Pierce good luck, God bless you both

[He has risen, his glass in hand All rise except MARIAN and PIERCE PIERCE has his arm around her, and as the curtain falls he kisses her]

THE END

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PRIVATE LIVES

(1930)

BY

NOEL COWARD

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

AMANDA PRYNNE
VICTOR PRYNNE, *her husband*
LOUISE, *a maid*
SIBYL CHASE
ELIOT CHASE, *her husband*

ACT I The Terrace of a Hotel in France Summer evening
ACT II AMANDA'S flat in Paris A few days later Evening
ACT III The same The next morning

TIME—The Present

NOEL COWARD

IN THE epilogue of *Fanny's First Play* Bernard Shaw has some London critics reciting all the traditional weaknesses of Shaw's plays. At the beginning of the second act of *Design for Living* Noel Coward has a successful playwright interviewed by a reporter from a London tabloid, and Coward takes advantage of this opportunity to travesty the stereotyped criticism of his own plays, to fling back the stream of adjectives which invariably greet each new play—"dexterous," "slick," "thin," "artificial," "impudent," "witty," "brittle," etc. Although these two scenes of literary bantering are vastly amusing, neither Shaw nor Coward confutes his critics, who are, for the most part, sound in their opinions of these playwrights. Coward, however, is still a young man, and shows signs of versatility that may force radical revisions of judgment.

Noel Coward was born at Teddington, near London, in 1899, and was educated at Croydon. He first appeared on the stage at the age of eleven, and has been connected with the theater almost continuously since then, except for a brief period of military service near the end of the World War, when he was just old enough to enlist. He wrote his first play, *I'll Leave It to You*, when he was twenty-one, and soon afterwards his first revue, *London Calling*, which ran a year. *The Young Idea* (1923) has some lively satire but a well-worn plot. It was *The Vortex* (1924) which first attracted critical attention, the almost hysterical nervousness of the play, its brutal wit, and its vulgarity were decried, but Coward was recognized as the leader of the post-war group of young playwrights. In the next two years he wrote six plays, only one of which, *Hay Fever*, showed any advance in merit. His popularity declined, and objections to the vulgarity and salacity of some unimportant comedies became almost violent. He then turned to operetta and musical comedy, winning reputation again and a fortune as well with *This Year of Grace*, a sophisticated revue, and *Bitter Sweet*, an operetta. Coward has written the books, lyrics, and music for his seven musical plays. In 1930 he entered the third phase of his career, and has so far written two farcical high comedies and two serious plays. *Private Lives* and *Design for Living* are the best English farces since *The Importance of Being Earnest*. *Design for Living* (1933), written especially to display the bravura of his friends Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne and himself, is an unsanely funny comedy of impossible people in impossible situations. *Post Mortem* (1930), as yet unacted, is an ironic, bitter tragedy, frankly didactic, which attempts to show that the Great Peace has been as futile and vile as the Great War itself. *Cavalcade* (1931) is a sentimental and stirring account of English history from the Boer War to the present as it touched the life of one London family. *Cavalcade* appeared at the correct psychological moment—at a time of resurgent nationalism—and made Coward a very popular and patriotic figure, it is a safe assumption, however, that the author wrote at least part of this chauvinistic drama with his tongue in his cheek.

After pondering over his plots for months, he writes the plays hurriedly—sometimes in a few days. *Private Lives* he wrote in a hotel bedroom in Shanghai while he was acting in a theatrical company presenting *Journey's End* in China. *Private Lives*, Coward's masterpiece, is lunatic comedy at its best. Charles Lamb once said of the characters in Restoration comedies that they live in an imaginary world subject only to the laws of that world, and that consequently we should not pass moral judgments upon them. One

is tempted to regard with equal indulgence the incredible characters of *Easy Virtue*, *Hay Fever*, *Private Lives*, and *Design for Living*, who are no more representative of the twentieth-century human beings than were the men and women of *The Country Wife* representative of the seventeenth century. *Private Lives* is essentially a farce, and its irresponsible, unconfirming, witty, slightly hysterical characters do not interest us for what they are, but by what they say and do. The author's world is a limited one—too limited—the smart set in which nearly every one is as smart as Noel Coward. There is much of the Restoration here: virtuous people are bores, the moral world is upside down. The talk is almost unfalteringly funny—impudent, often inconsequential, sometimes mad, sometimes wise. The comedy bristles with small audacities, with snips and jabs of dialogue. Coward is at his vulgar best in the scenes of abuse and contumely, the magnificent cataracts of invective almost always leading to blows.

His comedies have crust, but there is very little beneath. An occasional bit of gloomy and sophomoric philosophy, or a nasty comment on civilization, or a semi-defense of flippancy constitutes the only deflections from the comedic temper. Such a passage as the following is typical:

AMANDA Darling, I believe you are talking nonsense.

ELYOT So is every one else in the long run. Let's be superficial and pity the poor Philosophers. Let's blow trumpets and squeakers and enjoy the party as much as we can, like very small, quite idiotic school-children. Let's savor the delight of the moment. Come and kiss me, darling, before your body rots, and worms pop in and out of your eye sockets.

St. John Ervine professes to find a serious purpose in *Design for Living*, the eternal plea of the individualist to live his own life in his own way. At any rate the author of *Hay Fever*, *Post Mortem*, and *Cavalcade* can not be neatly pigeonholed as a mere disciple of the flippant school of Oscar Wilde.

Recent long plays such as *Conversation Piece* and *Point Valaine* are inferior to his gay farces, but his nine one-act plays *Tonight at 8.30* (1935), including comedies, fantasies, and tragedies, are excellent and lead some critics to assert that Coward-in-brief is preferable to Coward-unconfined. His witty and frank autobiography, *Present Indicative* (1937), is not only a highly entertaining success-story, it is also an illuminating study of a member of the "lost generation" in that hectic period between two wars when old values were being questioned and old taboos discarded, when a feverish search for excitement and a widespread feeling of disillusion created a sense of uncertainty and instability almost unknown in the placid early years of the century. At the outbreak of the war in 1939 Coward was first reported serving in the navy, later in the Ministry of Information (Propaganda). Among other things he is credited with the authorship of various propaganda leaflets scattered over Germany by the millions.

PRIVATE LIVES

ACT I

The Scene is the terrace of a hotel in France. There are two French windows at the back opening on to two separate suites. The terrace space is divided by a line of small trees in tubs, and, down the age running parallel with the footlights, there is a low stone balustrade. Upon each side of the line of tree tubs is a set of suitable terrace furniture, a swinging seat, two or three chairs, and a table. There are orange and white awnings shading the windows, as it is summer. When the curtain rises, it is about eight o'clock in the evening. There is an orchestra playing not very far off.
SIBYL CHASE opens the windows on the Right, and steps out on to the terrace. She is very pretty and blonde, and smartly dressed in traveling clothes. She comes downstage, stretches her arms wide with a little sigh of satisfaction, and regards the view with an ecstatic expression.

SIBYL [calling] Ell! E'll! dear, do come out. It's so lovely.

ELYOT [inside] Just a minute.

[After a pause ELYOT comes out. He is about thirty, quite slim and pleasant looking, and also in traveling clothes. He walks right down to the balustrade and looks thoughtfully at the view.]
SIBYL stands beside him, and slips her arm through his.]

ELYOT Not so bad.

SIBYL It's heavenly. Look at the lights of that yacht reflected in the water. Oh dear, I'm so happy.

ELYOT [smiling] Are you?

SIBYL Aren't you?

ELYOT Of course I am. Tremendously happy.

SIBYL Just to think, here we are, you and I, married!

ELYOT Yes, things have come to a pretty pass.

SIBYL Don't laugh at me, you mustn't be blasé about honeymoons just because this is your second.

ELYOT [frowning] That's silly.

SIBYL Have I annoyed you by saying that?

ELYOT Just a little.

SIBYL Oh, darling, I'm so sorry. [She holds her face up to his.] Kiss me.

ELYOT [doing so] There.

SIBYL Ummm, not so very enthusiastic.

ELYOT [kissing her again] That better?

SIBYL Three times, please, I'm superstitious.

ELYOT [kissing her] You really are very sweet.

SIBYL Are you glad you married me?

ELYOT Of course I am.

SIBYL How glad?

ELYOT Incredibly, magnificently glad.

SIBYL How lovely.

ELYOT We ought to go in and dress.

SIBYL Gladder than before?

ELYOT Why do you keep harping on that?

SIBYL It's in my mind, and yours too, I expect.

ELYOT It isn't anything of the sort.

SIBYL She was pretty, wasn't she? Amanda?

ELYOT Very pretty.

SIBYL Prettier than I am?

ELYOT Much.

SIBYL Elyot!

ELYOT She was pretty and sleek, and her hands were long and slim, and her legs were long and slim, and she danced like an angel. You dance very poorly, by the way.

SIBYL Could she play the piano as well as I can?

ELYOT She couldn't play the piano at all.

SIBYL [triumphantly] Aha! Had she my talent for organization?

ELYOT No, but she hadn't your mother either.

SIBYL I don't believe you like Mother.

ELYOT Like her! I can't bear her.

SIBYL Elyot! She's a darling, underneath.

ELYOT I never got underneath.

SIBYL It makes me unhappy to think you don't like Mother.

ELYOT Nonsense I believe the only reason you married me was to get away from her

SIBYL I married you because I loved you

ELYOT Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!

SIBYL I love you far more than Amanda loved you I'd never make you miserable like she did

ELYOT We made each other miserable

SIBYL It was all her fault, you know it was

ELYOT [*with vehemence*] Yes, it was Entirely her fault

SIBYL She was a fool to lose you

ELYOT We lost each other

SIBYL She lost you, with her violent tempers and carryings on

ELYOT Will you stop talking about Amanda?

SIBYL But I'm very glad, because if she hadn't been uncontrolled, and wicked, and unfaithful, we shouldn't be here now

ELYOT She wasn't unfaithful

SIBYL How do you know? I bet she was I bet she was unfaithful every five minutes

ELYOT It would take a far more concentrated woman than Amanda to be unfaithful every five minutes

SIBYL [*anxiously*] You do hate her, don't you?

ELYOT No, I don't hate her I think I despise her

SIBYL [*with satisfaction*] That's much worse

ELYOT And yet I'm sorry for her

SIBYL Why?

ELYOT Because she's marked for tragedy, she's bound to make a mess of everything

SIBYL If it's all her fault, I don't see that it matters much

ELYOT She has some very good qualities

SIBYL Considering what a hell she made of your life, I think you are very nice about her Most men would be vindictive

ELYOT What's the use of that? It's all over now, such a long time ago

SIBYL Five years isn't very long

ELYOT [*seriously*] Yes it is

SIBYL Do you think you could ever love her again?

ELYOT Now then, Sibyl

SIBYL But could you?

ELYOT Of course not, I love you

SIBYL Yes, but you love me differently, I know that

ELYOT More wisely perhaps

SIBYL I'm glad I'd rather have that sort of love

ELYOT You're right Love is no use unless it's wise and kind and undramatic Something steady and sweet, to smooth out your nerves when you're tired Something tremendously cosy, and unflurried by scenes and jealousies That's what I want, what I've always wanted, really Oh my dear, I do hope it's not going to be dull for you

SIBYL Sweetheart, as though you could ever be dull

ELYOT I'm much older than you

SIBYL Not so very much

ELYOT Seven years

SIBYL [*snuggling up to him*] The music has stopped now and you can hear the sea

ELYOT We'll bathe to-morrow morning

SIBYL I mustn't get sunburnt

ELYOT Why not?

SIBYL I hate it on women

ELYOT Very well, you shan't then I hope you don't hate it on men

SIBYL Of course I don't It's suitable to men

ELYOT You're a completely feminine little creature, aren't you?

SIBYL Why do you say that?

ELYOT Everything in its place

SIBYL What do you mean?

ELYOT If you feel you'd like me to smoke a pipe, I'll try and master it

SIBYL I like a man to be a man, if that's what you mean

ELYOT Are you going to understand me, and manage me?

SIBYL I'm going to try to understand you

ELYOT Run me without my knowing it?

SIBYL [*withdrawing slightly*] I think you're being a little unkind

ELYOT No, I don't mean to be I was only wondering

SIBYL Well?

ELYOT I was wondering what was going on inside your mind, what your plans are really?

SIBYL Plans? Oh, Eh!

ELYOT Apart from loving me and all that, you must have plans

SIBYL I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about

ELYOT Perhaps it's subconscious then, age-old instincts working away deep down,

mincing up little bits of experience for future use, watching me carefully like a little sharp-eyed, blonde kitten

SIBYL How can you be so horrid

ELYOT I said Kitten, not Cat

SIBYL Kittens grow into cats

ELYOT Let that be a warning to you

SIBYL [*slapping her arm through his* *agam*] What's the matter, darling, are you hungry?

ELYOT Not a bit

SIBYL You're very strange all of a sudden, and rather cruel Just because I'm remiss It doesn't mean that I'm crafty and calculating

ELYOT I didn't say you were either of those things

SIBYL I hate these half-masculine women who go banging about

ELYOT I hate anybody who goes banging about

SIBYL I should think you needed a little quiet womanliness after Amanda

ELYOT Why will you keep on talking about her?

SIBYL It's natural enough, isn't it?

ELYOT What do you want to find out?

SIBYL Why did you really let her divorce you?

ELYOT She divorced me for cruelty, and flagrant infidelity I spent a whole week-end at Brighton with a lady called Vera Williams She had the nastiest-looking hair brush I have ever seen

SIBYL Misplaced chivalry, I call it Why didn't you divorce her?

ELYOT It would not have been the action of a gentleman, whatever that may mean

SIBYL I think she got off very lightly

ELYOT Once and for all, will you stop talking about her?

SIBYL Yes, Eli dear

ELYOT I don't wish to see her again or hear her name mentioned

SIBYL Very well, darling

ELYOT Is that understood?

SIBYL Yes, darling Where did you spend your honeymoon?

ELYOT St Moritz Be quiet

SIBYL I hate St Moritz

ELYOT So do I, bitterly

SIBYL Was she good on skis?

ELYOT Do you want to dine downstairs here, or at the Casino?

SIBYL I love you, I love you, I love you

ELYOT Good, let's go in and dress

SIBYL Kiss me first

ELYOT [*kissing her*] Casino?

SIBYL Yes Are you a gambler? You never told me

ELYOT Every now and then

SIBYL I shall come and sit just behind your chair and bring you luck

ELYOT That will be fatal

[*They go off into their suite There is a slight pause and then VICTOR PRYNNE enters from the Left suite He is quite nice-looking, about thirty or thirty-five He is dressed in a light traveling suit He sniffs the air, looks at the view, and then turns back to the window*]

VICTOR [*calling*] Mandy

AMANDA [*inside*] What?

VICTOR Come outside, the view is wonderful

AMANDA I'm still damp from the bath Wait a minute— [*VICTOR lights a cigarette Presently AMANDA comes out on to the terrace She is quite exquisite with a gay face and a perfect figure At the moment she is wearing a negligee*] I shall catch pneumonia, that's what I shall catch

VICTOR [*looking at her*] God!

AMANDA I beg your pardon?

VICTOR You look wonderful

AMANDA Thank you, darling

VICTOR Like a beautiful advertise-
ment for something

AMANDA Nothing peculiar, I hope

VICTOR I can hardly believe it's true You and I, here alone together, married!

AMANDA [*rubbing her face on his shoulder*] That stuff's very rough

VICTOR Don't you like it?

AMANDA A bit hearty, isn't it?

VICTOR Do you love me?

AMANDA Of course, that's why I'm here

VICTOR More than—

AMANDA Now then, none of that

VICTOR No, but do you love me more than you loved Elyot?

AMANDA I don't remember, it's such a long time ago

VICTOR Not so very long

AMANDA [*flinging out her arms*] All my life ago

VICTOR I'd like to break his damned neck

AMANDA [*laughing*] Why?

VICTOR For making you unhappy

AMANDA It was mutual

VICTOR Rubbish! It was all his fault, you know it was

AMANDA Yes, it was, now I come to think about it

VICTOR Swine!

AMANDA Don't be so vehement, darling

VICTOR I'll never treat you like that

AMANDA That's right

VICTOR I love you too much

AMANDA So did he

VICTOR Fine sort of love that is He struck you once, didn't he?

AMANDA More than once

VICTOR Where?

AMANDA Several places

VICTOR What a cad

AMANDA I struck him, too Once I broke four gramophone records over his head It was very satisfying

VICTOR You must have been driven to distraction

AMANDA Yes, I was, but don't let's talk about it, please After all, it's a dreary subject for our honeymoon night

VICTOR He didn't know when he was well off

AMANDA Look at the lights of that yacht reflected in the water I wonder whose it is

VICTOR We must bathe to-morrow

AMANDA Yes I want to get a nice sunburn

VICTOR [*reproachfully*] Mandy!

AMANDA Why, what's the matter?

VICTOR I hate sunburnt women

AMANDA Why?

VICTOR It's somehow, well, unsuitable

AMANDA It's awfully suitable to me, darling

VICTOR Of course if you really want to

AMANDA I'm absolutely determined I've got masses of lovely oil to rub all over myself

VICTOR Your skin is so beautiful as it is

AMANDA Wait and see When I'm done a nice crisp brown, you'll fall in love with me all over again

VICTOR I couldn't love you more than I do now

AMANDA Oh, dear I did so hope our honeymoon was going to be progressive

VICTOR Where did you spend the last one?

AMANDA [*warningly*] Victor

VICTOR I want to know

AMANDA St Moritz It was very attractive

VICTOR I hate St Moritz

AMANDA So do I

VICTOR Did he start quarreling with you right away?

AMANDA Within the first few days I put it down to the high altitudes

VICTOR And you loved him?

AMANDA Yes, Victor

VICTOR You poor child

AMANDA You must try not to be pompous, dear [*She turns away*]

VICTOR [*hurt*] Mandy!

AMANDA I don't believe I'm a bit like what you think I am

VICTOR How do you mean?

AMANDA I was never a poor child

VICTOR Figure of speech, dear, that's all

AMANDA I suffered a good deal, and had my heart broken But it wasn't an innocent girlish heart It was jagged with sophistication I've always been sophisticated, far too knowing That caused many of my rows with Elyot I irritated him because he knew I could see through him

VICTOR I don't mind how much you see through me

AMANDA Sweet [*She kisses him*]

VICTOR I'm going to make you happy

AMANDA Are you?

VICTOR Just by looking after you, and seeing that you're all right, you know

AMANDA [*a trifle untrustfully*] No, I don't know

VICTOR I think you love me quite differently from the way you loved Elyot

AMANDA Do stop harping on Elyot

VICTOR It's true, though, isn't it?

AMANDA I love you much more calmly, if that's what you mean

VICTOR More lastingly?

AMANDA I expect so

VICTOR Do you remember when I first met you?

AMANDA Yes Distinctly

VICTOR At Marion Vale's party

AMANDA Yes

VICTOR Wasn't it wonderful?

AMANDA Not really, dear It was only redeemed from the completely commonplace by the fact of my having hiccoughs

VICTOR I never noticed them

AMANDA Love at first sight

VICTOR Where did you first meet Elyot?

AMANDA To hell with Elyot

VICTOR Mandy!

AMANDA I forbid you to mention his name again I'm sick of the sound of it You must be raving mad Here we are on the first night of our honeymoon, with the moon coming up, and the music playing, and all you can do is to talk about my first husband It's downright sacrilegious

VICTOR Don't be angry

AMANDA Well, it's very annoying

VICTOR Will you forgive me?

AMANDA Yes, only don't do it again

VICTOR I promise

AMANDA You'd better go and dress now, you haven't bathed yet

VICTOR Where shall we dine, downstairs here, or at the Casino?

AMANDA The Casino is more fun, I think

VICTOR We can play Boule afterwards

AMANDA No, we can't, dear

VICTOR Don't you like dear old Boule?

AMANDA No, I hate dear old Boule. We'll play a nice game of Chemin de fer. VICTOR [*apprehensively*] Not at the big table?

AMANDA Maybe at the biggest table

VICTOR You're not a terrible gambler, are you?

AMANDA Inveterate. Chance rules my life

VICTOR What nonsense

AMANDA How can you say it's nonsense? It was chance meeting you. It was chance falling in love, it's chance that we're here, particularly after your driving. Everything that happens is chance.

VICTOR You know I feel rather scared of you at close quarters

AMANDA That promises to be very embarrassing

VICTOR You're somewhat different now, wilder than I thought you were, more strained

AMANDA Wilder! Oh Victor, I've never felt less wild in my life. A little strained, I grant you, but that's the newly married atmosphere, you can't expect anything else. Honeymooning is a very overrated amusement

VICTOR You say that because you had a ghastly experience before

AMANDA There you go again

VICTOR It couldn't fail to embitter you a little

AMANDA The honeymoon wasn't such a ghastly experience really, it was afterwards that was so awful

VICTOR I intend to make you forget it all entirely

AMANDA You won't succeed by making constant references to it

VICTOR I wish I knew you better

AMANDA It's just as well you don't. The "woman"—in italics—should always retain a certain amount of alluring feminine mystery for the "man"—also in italics

VICTOR What about the man? Isn't he allowed to have any mystery?

AMANDA Absolutely none. Transparent as glass

VICTOR Oh, I see

AMANDA Never mind, darling, it doesn't necessarily work out like that, it's only supposed to

VICTOR I'm glad I'm normal

AMANDA What an odd thing to be glad about. Why?

VICTOR Well, aren't you?

AMANDA I'm not so sure I'm normal

VICTOR Oh, Mandy, of course you are, sweetly, divinely normal

AMANDA I haven't any peculiar cravings for Chinamen or old boots, if that's what you mean

VICTOR [*scandalized*] Mandy!

AMANDA I think very few people are completely normal really, deep down in their private lives. It all depends on a combination of circumstances. If all the various cosmic thungummys fuse at the same moment, and the right spark is struck, there's no knowing what one mightn't do. That was the trouble with Elyot and me, we were like two violent acids bubbling about in a nasty little matrimonial bottle

VICTOR I don't believe you're nearly as complex as you think you are

AMANDA I don't think I'm particularly complex, but I know I'm unreliable

VICTOR You're frightening me horribly. In what way unreliable?

AMANDA I'm so apt to see things the wrong way round

VICTOR What sort of things?

AMANDA Morals. What one should do and what one shouldn't

VICTOR [*fondly*] Darling, you're so sweet

AMANDA Thank you, Victor, that's most encouraging. You really must have your bath now. Come along

VICTOR Kiss me

AMANDA [*doing so*] There, dear, hurry now. I've only got to slip my dress on and then I shall be ready

VICTOR Give me ten minutes

AMANDA I'll bring the cocktails out here when they come

VICTOR All right

AMANDA Go along now, hurry

[*They both disappear into their suite. After a moment's pause ELYOT steps carefully on to the terrace carrying a tray upon which are two champagne cocktails. He puts the tray down on the table.*]

ELYOT [*calling*] Sibyl
 SIBYL [*inside*] Yes
 ELYOT I've brought the cocktails out here, hurry up
 SIBYL I can't find my lipstick
 ELYOT Never mind, send down to the kitchen for some cochineal
 SIBYL Don't be so silly
 ELYOT Hurry
 [ELYOT saunters down to the balustrade He looks casually over on to the next terrace, and then out at the view He looks up at the moon and sighs, then he sits down in a chair with his back towards the line of tubs, and lights a cigarette AMANDA steps gingerly on to her terrace carrying a tray with two champagne cocktails on it She is wearing a charmingly simple evening gown, her cloak is flung over her right shoulder She places the tray carefully on the table, puts her cloak over the back of a chair, and sits down with her back towards ELYOT She takes a small mirror from her handbag and scrutinizes her face in it The orchestra downstairs strikes up a new melody Both ELYOT and AMANDA give a little start After a moment, ELYOT pensively begins to hum the tune the band is playing It is a sentimental, romantic little tune AMANDA hears him, and clutches at her throat suddenly as though she were suffocating Then she jumps up noiselessly, and peers over the line of tubs ELYOT, with his back to her, continues to sing obliviously She sits down again, relaxing with a gesture almost of despair Then she looks anxiously over her shoulder at the window in case VICTOR should be listening, and then, with a little smile, she takes up the melody herself, clearly ELYOT stops dead and gives a gasp, then he jumps up, and stands looking at her She continues to sing pretending not to know that he is there At the end of the song, she turns slowly, and faces him]
 AMANDA Thoughtful of them to play that, wasn't it?
 ELYOT [*in a stifled voice*] What are you doing here?
 AMANDA I'm on honeymoon
 ELYOT How interesting, so am I
 AMANDA I hope you're enjoying it
 ELYOT It hasn't started yet
 AMANDA Neither has mine
 ELYOT Oh, my God!

AMANDA I can't help feeling that this is a little unfortunate
 ELYOT Are you happy?
 AMANDA Perfectly
 ELYOT Good That's all right, then, isn't it?
 AMANDA Are you?
 ELYOT Ecstatically
 AMANDA I'm delighted to hear it We shall probably meet again sometime At the reservoir! [*She turns*]
 ELYOT [*firmly*] Good-bye
 [She goes indoors without looking back He stands gazing after her with an expression of horror on his face SIBYL comes brightly on to the terrace in a very pretty evening frock]
 SIBYL Cocktail, please [ELYOT doesn't answer] Eh, what's the matter?
 ELYOT I feel very odd
 SIBYL Odd, what do you mean, ill?
 ELYOT Yes, ill
 SIBYL [*alarmed*] What sort of —
 ELYOT We must leave at once
 SIBYL Leave!
 ELYOT Yes, dear Leave immediately
 SIBYL Eh!
 ELYOT I have a strange foreboding
 SIBYL You must be mad
 ELYOT Listen, darling, I want you to be very sweet, and patient, and understanding, and not be upset, or ask any questions, or anything I have an absolute conviction that our whole future happiness depends upon our leaving here instantly
 SIBYL Why?
 ELYOT I can't tell you why
 SIBYL But we've only just come
 ELYOT I know that, but it can't be helped
 SIBYL What's happened, what has happened?
 ELYOT Nothing has happened
 SIBYL You've gone out of your mind
 ELYOT I haven't gone out of my mind, but I shall if we stay here another hour
 SIBYL You're not drunk, are you?
 ELYOT Of course I'm not drunk What time have I had to get drunk?
 SIBYL Come down and have some dinner, darling, and then you'll feel ever so much better
 ELYOT It's no use trying to humor me I'm serious
 SIBYL But darling, please be reasonable We've only just arrived, everything's unpacked It's our first night together We can't go away now

ELYOT We can have our first night together in Paris

SIBYL We shouldn't get there until the small hours

ELYOT [*with a great effort at calmness*] Now, please, Sibyl, I know it sounds crazy to you, and utterly lacking in reason and sense, but I've got second sight over certain things I'm almost psychic I've got the most extraordinary sensation of impending disaster If we stay here something appalling will happen I know it

SIBYL [*firmly*] Hysterical nonsense

ELYOT It isn't hysterical nonsense Presentiments are far from being nonsense Look at the woman who cancelled her passage on the *Titanic* All because of a presentiment

SIBYL I don't see what that has to do with it

ELYOT It has everything to do with it She obeyed her instincts, that's what she did, and saved her life All I ask is to be allowed to obey my instincts

SIBYL Do you mean that there's going to be an earthquake or something?

ELYOT Very possibly, very possibly indeed, or perhaps a violent explosion

SIBYL They don't have earthquakes in France

ELYOT On the contrary, only the other day they felt a distinct shock at Toulon

SIBYL Yes, but that's in the South where it's hot

ELYOT Don't quibble, Sibyl

SIBYL And as for explosions, there's nothing here that can explode

ELYOT Oho, isn't there!

SIBYL Yes, but Eli—

ELYOT Darling, be sweet Bear with me I beseech you to bear with me

SIBYL I don't understand It's horrid of you to do this

ELYOT I'm not doing anything I'm only asking you, imploring you to come away from this place

SIBYL But I love it here

ELYOT There are thousands of other places, far nicer

SIBYL It's a pity we didn't go to one of them

ELYOT Now, listen, Sibyl—

SIBYL Yes, but why are you behaving like this, why, why, why?

ELYOT Don't ask why Just give in to me I swear I'll never ask you to give in to me over anything again

SIBYL [*with complete decision*] I won't think of going to-night It's utterly ridiculous I've done quite enough traveling for one day, and I'm tired

ELYOT You're as obstinate as a mule

SIBYL I like that, I must say

ELYOT [*hoily*] You've got your nasty little feet dug into the ground, and you don't intend to budge an inch, do you?

SIBYL [*with spirit*] No, I do not

ELYOT If there's one thing in the world that infuriates me, it's sheer wanton stubbornness I should like to cut off your head with a meat ax

SYBIL How dare you talk to me like that, on our honeymoon night

ELYOT Damn our honeymoon night Damn it, damn it, damn it!

SIBYL [*bursting into tears*] Oh, Eli, Eli—

ELYOT Stop crying Will you or will you not come away with me to Paris?

SIBYL I've never been so miserable in my life You're hateful and beastly Mother was perfectly right She said you had shifty eyes

ELYOT Well, she can't talk Her's are so close together, you couldn't put a needle between them

SIBYL You don't love me a little bit I wish I were dead

ELYOT Will you or will you not come to Paris?

SIBYL No, no I won't

ELYOT Oh, my God!

[*He stamps indoors*]

SIBYL [*following him wailing*] Oh, Eli, Eli, Eli—

[*VICTOR comes stamping out of the French windows on the left, followed by AMANDA*]

VICTOR You were certainly right when you said you weren't normal You're behaving like a lunatic

AMANDA Not at all All I have done is to ask you a little favor

VICTOR Little favor indeed

AMANDA If we left now we could be in Paris in a few hours

VICTOR If we crossed Siberia by train we could be in China in a fortnight, but I don't see any reason to do it

AMANDA Oh, Victor darling—please, please—be sensible, just for my sake

VICTOR Sensible!

AMANDA Yes, sensible I shall be absolutely miserable if we stay here You don't want me to be absolutely miserable all through my honeymoon, do you?

VICTOR But why on earth didn't you think of your sister's tragedy before?

AMANDA I forgot

VICTOR You couldn't forget a thing like that

AMANDA I got the places muddled

Then when I saw the Casino there in the moonlight, it all came back to me

VICTOR When did all this happen?

AMANDA Years ago, but it might just as well have been yesterday I can see her now lying dead, with that dreadful expression on her face Then all that awful business of taking the body home to England It was perfectly horrible

VICTOR I never knew you had a sister

AMANDA I haven't any more

VICTOR There's something behind all this

AMANDA Don't be silly What could there be behind it?

VICTOR Well, for one thing, I know you're lying

AMANDA Victor!

VICTOR Be honest Aren't you?

AMANDA I can't think how you can be so mean and suspicious

VICTOR [*patiently*] You're lying, Amanda Aren't you?

AMANDA Yes, Victor

VICTOR You never had a sister, dead or alive?

AMANDA I believe there was a still-born one in 1902

VICTOR What is your reason for all this?

AMANDA I told you I was unreliable

VICTOR Why do you want to leave so badly?

AMANDA You'll be angry if I tell you the truth

VICTOR What is it?

AMANDA I warn you

VICTOR Tell me Please tell me

AMANDA Elyot's here

VICTOR What!

AMANDA I saw him

VICTOR When?

AMANDA Just now, when you were in the bath

VICTOR Where was he?

AMANDA [*hesitatingly*] Down there, in a white suit

[*She points over the balustrade*]

VICTOR [*skeptically*] White suit?

AMANDA Why not? It's summer, isn't it?

VICTOR You're lying again

AMANDA I'm not He's here I swear he is

VICTOR Well, what of it?

AMANDA I can't enjoy a honeymoon with you, with Elyot liable to bounce in at any moment

VICTOR Really, Mandy

AMANDA Can't you see how awful it

is? It's the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me in my whole life

VICTOR Did he see you?

AMANDA No, he was running

VICTOR What was he running for?

AMANDA How on earth do I know?

Don't be so annoying

VICTOR Well, as long as he didn't see you it's all right, isn't it?

AMANDA It isn't all right at all We must leave immediately

VICTOR But why?

AMANDA How can you be so ap-
pallingly obstinate!

VICTOR I'm not afraid of him

AMANDA Neither am I It's not a question of being afraid It's just a horrible, awkward situation

VICTOR I'm damned if I see why our whole honeymoon should be upset by Elyot!

AMANDA My last one was

VICTOR I don't believe you at all

AMANDA He is here, I tell you I saw him

VICTOR It was probably an optical illusion This half light is deceptive

AMANDA It was no such thing

VICTOR I absolutely refuse to change all our plans at the last moment, just because you think you've seen Elyot It's unreasonable and ridiculous of you to demand it Even if he is here I can't see that it matters He'll probably feel much more embarrassed than you, and a damned good job too, and if he annoys you in any way I'll knock him down

AMANDA That would be charming

VICTOR Now don't let's talk about it any more

AMANDA Do you mean to stand there seriously and imagine that the whole thing can be glossed over as easily as that?

VICTOR I'm not going to leave, Mandy If I start giving into you as early as this, our lives will be unbearable

AMANDA [*outraged*] Victor!

VICTOR [*calmly*] You've worked yourself up into a state over a situation which really only exists in your mind

AMANDA [*controlling herself with an effort*] Please, Victor, please, for this last time I implore you Let's go to Paris now, to-night I mean it with all my heart—please—

VICTOR [*with gentle firmness*] No, Mandy!

AMANDA I see quite clearly that I have been foolish enough to marry a fat old gentleman in a club armchair

VICTOR It's no use being cross

AMANDA You're a pompous ass

VICTOR [*horrificed*] Mandy!

AMANDA [*enraged*] Pompous ass, that's what I said, and that's what I meant Blown out with your own importance

VICTOR Mandy, control yourself

AMANDA Get away from me I can't bear to think I'm married to such rugged grandeur

VICTOR [*with great dignity*] I shall be in the bar When you are ready to come down and dine, let me know

AMANDA [*flinging herself into a chair*] Go away, go away

[*VICTOR stalks off at the same moment that ELYOT stamps on, on the other side, followed by SIBYL in tears*]

ELYOT If you don't stop screaming, I'll murder you

SIBYL I wish to heaven I'd never seen you in my life, let alone married you I don't wonder Amanda left you, if you behaved to her as you've behaved to me I'm going down to have dinner by myself and you can do just what you like about it

ELYOT Do, and I hope it chokes you

SIBYL O Elli, Elli—

[*She goes wailing indoors ELYOT stamps down to the balustrade and lights a cigarette, obviously trying to control his nerves AMANDA sees him, and comes down, too*]

AMANDA Give me one for God's sake

ELYOT [*hands her his case laconically*] Here

AMANDA [*taking a cigarette*] I'm in such a rage

ELYOT [*lighting up*] So am I

AMANDA What are we to do?

ELYOT I don't know

AMANDA Whose yacht is that?

ELYOT The Duke of Westminster's, I expect It always is

AMANDA I wish I were on it

ELYOT I wish you were too

AMANDA There's no need to be nasty

ELYOT Yes there is, every need I've never in my life felt a greater urge to be nasty

AMANDA And you've had some urges in your time, haven't you?

ELYOT If you start bickering with me, Amanda, I swear I'll throw you over the edge

AMANDA Try it, that's all, just try it

ELYOT You've upset everything, as usual

AMANDA I've upset everything! What about you?

ELYOT Ever since the first moment I was unlucky enough to set eyes on you my life has been insupportable

AMANDA Oh do shut up, there's no sense in going on like that

ELYOT Nothing's any use There's no escape, ever

AMANDA Don't be melodramatic

ELYOT Do you want a cocktail? There are two here

AMANDA There are two over here as well

ELYOT We'll have my two first

[*AMANDA crosses over into ELYOT'S part of the terrace He gives her one, and keeps one himself*]

AMANDA Shall we get roaring screaming drunk?

ELYOT I don't think that would help, we did it once before and it was a dismal failure

AMANDA It was lovely at the beginning

ELYOT You have an immoral memory, Amanda Here's to you

[*They raise their glasses solemnly and drink*]

AMANDA I tried to get away the moment after I'd seen you, but he wouldn't budge

ELYOT What's his name?

AMANDA Victor, Victor Prynne

ELYOT [*toasting*] Mr and Mrs Victor Prynne [*He drinks*] Mine wouldn't budge either

AMANDA What's her name?

ELYOT Sibyl

AMANDA [*toasting*] Mr and Mrs Elyot Chase [*She drinks*] God pity the poor girl

ELYOT Are you in love with him?

AMANDA Of course

ELYOT How funny

AMANDA I don't see anything particularly funny about it You're certainly in love with yours, aren't you?

ELYOT Certainly

AMANDA There you are then

ELYOT There we both are then

AMANDA What's she like?

ELYOT Fair, very pretty, plays the piano beautifully

AMANDA Very comforting

ELYOT How's yours?

AMANDA I don't want to discuss him

ELYOT Well, it doesn't matter He'll probably come popping out in a minute and I shall see for myself Does he know I'm here?

AMANDA Yes, I told him
 ELYOT [*with sarcasm*] That's going to make things a whole lot easier

AMANDA You needn't be frightened, he won't hurt you

ELYOT If he comes near me I'll scream the place down

AMANDA Does Sibyl know I'm here?
 ELYOT No, I pretended I had a pre-sentiment I tried terribly hard to persuade her to leave for Paris

AMANDA I tried too, it's lucky we didn't both succeed, isn't it? Otherwise we should probably all have joined up in Rouen or somewhere

ELYOT [*laughing*] In some frowsy little hotel

AMANDA [*laughing too*] Oh dear, it would have been much, much worse

ELYOT I can see us all sailing down in the morning for an early start

AMANDA [*weakly*] Lovely, oh lovely
 ELYOT Glorious!

[*They both laugh helplessly*]
 AMANDA What's happened to yours?

ELYOT Didn't you hear her screaming? She's downstairs in the dining-room I think

AMANDA Mine is being grand, in the bar

ELYOT It really is awfully difficult

AMANDA Have you known her long?

ELYOT About four months, we met in a house party in Norfolk

AMANDA Very flat, Norfolk

ELYOT How old is dear Victor?

AMANDA Thirty-four, or five, and Sibyl?

ELYOT I blush to tell you, only twenty-three

AMANDA You've gone a mucker all right

ELYOT I shall reserve my opinion of your choice until I've met dear Victor

AMANDA I wish you wouldn't go on calling him "Dear Victor" It's extremely irritating

ELYOT That's how I see him Dumpy, and fair, and very considerate, with glasses Dear Victor

AMANDA As I said before I would rather not discuss him At least I have good taste enough to refrain from making cheap gibes at Sibyl

ELYOT You said Norfolk was flat

AMANDA That was no reflection on her, unless she made it flatter

ELYOT Your voice takes on an acid quality whenever you mention her name

AMANDA I'll never mention it again

ELYOT Good, and I'll keep off Victor

AMANDA [*with dignity*] Thank you
 [*There is silence for a moment The orchestra starts playing the same tune that they were singing previously*]

ELYOT That orchestra has a remarkably small repertoire

AMANDA They don't seem to know anything but this, do they?

[*She sits down on the balustrade and sings it softly Her eyes are looking out to sea, and her mind is far away ELYOT watches her while she sings When she turns to him at the end there are tears in her eyes He looks away awkwardly and lights another cigarette*]

ELYOT You always had a sweet voice Amanda

AMANDA [*a little huskily*] Thank you

ELYOT I'm awfully sorry about all this, really I am I wouldn't have had it happen for all the world

AMANDA I know I'm sorry too It's just rotten luck

ELYOT I'll go away to-morrow whatever happens, so don't you worry

AMANDA That's nice of you

ELYOT I hope everything turns out splendidly for you and that you'll be very happy

AMANDA I hope the same for you, too

[*The music, which has been playing continually through this little scene, returns persistently to the refrain They both look at one another and laugh*]

ELYOT Nasty insistent little tune

AMANDA Extraordinary how potent cheap music is

ELYOT What exactly were you remembering at that moment?

AMANDA The Palace Hotel Skating Rink in the morning, bright strong sun light, and everybody whirling round in vivid colors, and you kneeling down to put on my skates for me

ELYOT You'd fallen on your fanny a few moments before

AMANDA It was beastly of you to laugh like that, I felt so humiliated

ELYOT Poor darling

AMANDA Do you remember waking up in the morning, and standing on the balcony, looking out across the valley?

ELYOT Blue shadows on white snow, cleanness beyond belief, high above everything in the world How beautiful it was

AMANDA It's nice to think we had a few marvelous moments

ELYOT A few? We had heaps really

only they slip away into the background, and one only remembers the bad ones

AMANDA Yes What fools we were to run it all What utter, utter fools

ELYOT You feel like that too, do you?

AMANDA [*wearily*] Of course

ELYOT Why did we?

AMANDA The whole business was too much for us

ELYOT We were so ridiculously over in love

AMANDA Funny, wasn't it?

ELYOT [*sadly*] Horribly funny

AMANDA Selfishness, cruelty, hatred, possessiveness, petty jealousy All those qualities came out in us just because we loved each other

ELYOT Perhaps they were there anyhow

AMANDA No, it's love that does it To hell with love

ELYOT To hell with love

AMANDA And yet here we are starting afresh with two quite different people In love all over again, aren't we? [*ELYOT doesn't answer*] Aren't we?

ELYOT No

AMANDA Elyot!

ELYOT We're not in love all over again, and you know it Good night, Amanda

[*He turns abruptly and goes towards the French windows*]

AMANDA Elyot—don't be silly—come back

ELYOT I must go and find Sibyl

AMANDA I must go and find Victor

ELYOT [*savagely*] Well, why don't you?

AMANDA I don't want to

ELYOT It's shameful, shameful of us

AMANDA Don't I feel terrible Don't leave me for a minute—I shall go mad if you do We won't talk about ourselves any more, we'll just talk about outside things, anything you like, only just don't leave me until I've pulled myself together

ELYOT Very well

[*There is a dead silence*]

AMANDA What have you been doing lately? During these last years?

ELYOT Traveling about I went round the world, you know, after—

AMANDA [*hurriedly*] Yes, yes, I know How was it?

ELYOT The world?

AMANDA Yes

ELYOT Oh, highly enjoyable

AMANDA China must be very interesting

ELYOT Very big, China

AMANDA And Japan—

ELYOT Very small

AMANDA Did you eat sharks' fins, and take your shoes off, and use chopsticks and everything?

ELYOT Practically everything

AMANDA And India, the burning Ghars, or Ghats, or whatever they are, and the Taj Mahal How was the Taj Mahal?

ELYOT [*looking at her*] Unbelievable, a sort of dream

AMANDA That was the moonlight I expect, you must have seen it in the moonlight

ELYOT [*never taking his eyes off her face*] Yes, moonlight is cruelly deceptive

AMANDA And it didn't look like a biscuit box, did it? I've always felt that it might

ELYOT [*quietly*] Darling, darling, I love you so

AMANDA And I do hope you met a sacred Elephant They're lint white I believe, and very, very sweet

ELYOT I've never loved any one else for an instant

AMANDA [*raising her hand feebly in protest*] No, no, you mustn't—Elyot—stop

ELYOT You love me, too, don't you? There's no doubt about it anywhere, is there?

AMANDA No, no doubt anywhere

ELYOT You're looking very lovely you know, in this damned moonlight Your skin is clear and cool, and your eyes are shining, and you're growing lovelier and lovelier every second as I look at you You don't hold any mystery for me, darling, do you mind? There isn't a particle of you that I don't know, remember, and want

AMANDA [*softly*] I'm glad, my sweet

ELYOT More than any desire anywhere, deep down in my deepest heart I want you back again—please—

AMANDA [*putting her hand over his mouth*] Don't say any more, you're making me cry so dreadfully

[*He pulls her gently into his arms and they stand silently, completely oblivious to everything but the moment and each other When finally, they separate, they sit down, rather breathlessly, on the balustrade*]

AMANDA What now? Oh darling, what now?

ELYOT I don't know, I'm lost, utterly

AMANDA We must think quickly, oh quickly —

ELYOT Escape?

AMANDA Together?

ELYOT Yes, of course, now, now!

AMANDA We can't, we can't, you know we can't

ELYOT We must

AMANDA It would break Victor's heart

ELYOT And Sibyl's too probably, but they're bound to suffer anyhow Think of the hell we'd lead them into if we stayed Infinitely worse than any cruelty in the world, pretending to love them, and loving each other, so desperately

AMANDA We must tell them

ELYOT What?

AMANDA Call them, and tell them

ELYOT Oh, no, no, that's impossible

AMANDA It's honest

ELYOT I can't help how honest it is, it's too horrible to think of How should we start? What should we say?

AMANDA We should have to trust to the inspiration of the moment

ELYOT It would be a moment completely devoid of inspiration The most appalling moment imaginable No, no, we can't, you must see that, we simply can't

AMANDA What do you propose to do, then? As it is they might appear at any moment

ELYOT We've got to decide instantly one way or another Go away together now, or stay with them, and never see one another again, ever

AMANDA Don't be silly, what choice is there?

ELYOT No choice at all, come —

[*He takes her hand*]

AMANDA No, wait This is sheer raving madness, something's happened to us, we're not sane

ELYOT We never were

AMANDA Where can we go?

ELYOT Paris first, my car's in the garage, all ready

AMANDA They'll follow us

ELYOT That doesn't matter, once the thing's done

AMANDA I've got a flat in Paris

ELYOT Good

AMANDA It's in the Avenue Montaigne I let it to Freda Lawson, but she's in Biarritz, so it's empty

ELYOT Does Victor know?

AMANDA No, he knows I have one but he hasn't the faintest idea where

ELYOT Better and better

AMANDA We're being so bad, so terribly bad, we'll suffer for this, I know we shall

ELYOT Can't be helped

AMANDA Starting all those awful rows all over again

ELYOT No, no, we're older and wiser now

AMANDA What difference does that make? The first moment either of us gets a bit nervy, off we'll go again

ELYOT Stop shilly-shallying, Amanda

AMANDA I'm trying to be sensible

ELYOT You're only succeeding in being completely idiotic

AMANDA Idiotic indeed! What about you?

ELYOT Now look here, Amanda —

AMANDA [*stricken*] Oh my God!

ELYOT [*rushing to her and kissing her*] Darling, darling, I didn't mean it —

AMANDA I won't move from here unless we have a compact, a sacred, sacred compact never to quarrel again

ELYOT Easy to make but difficult to keep

AMANDA No, no, it's the bickering that always starts it The moment we notice we're bickering, either of us, we must promise on our honor to stop dead We'll invent some phrase or catchword, which when either of us says it, automatically cuts off all conversation for at least five minutes

ELYOT Two minutes, dear, with an option of renewal

AMANDA Very well, what shall it be?

ELYOT [*hurriedly*] Solomon Isaacs

AMANDA All right, that'll do

ELYOT Come on, come on

AMANDA What shall we do if we meet either of them on the way downstairs?

ELYOT Run like stags

AMANDA What about clothes?

ELYOT I've got a couple of bags I haven't unpacked yet

AMANDA I've got a small trunk

ELYOT Send the porter up for it

AMANDA Oh this is terrible — terrible —

ELYOT Come on, come on, don't waste time

AMANDA Oughtn't we to leave notes or something?

ELYOT No, no, no, we'll telegraph from somewhere on the road

AMANDA Darling, I daren't, it's too wicked of us, I simply daren't

ELYOT [*seizing her in his arms and kissing her violently*] Now will you behave?

AMANDA Yes, but Elyot darling —

ELYOT Solomon Isaacs!

[*They rush off together through*

ELYOT'S suite After a moment or so, VICTOR steps out on to the terrace and looks round anxiously Then he goes back indoors again, and can be heard calling "MANDY" Finally he again comes out on to the terrace and comes despondently down to the balustrade He hears SIBYL'S voice calling "ELLI" and looks round as she comes out of the French windows She jumps slightly upon seeing him]

VICTOR Good evening

SIBYL [*rather flustered*] Good evening

—I was—er—looking for my husband

VICTOR Really, that's funny I was looking for my wife

SIBYL Quite a coincidence

[*She laughs nervously*]

VICTOR [*after a pause*] It's very nice here, isn't it?

SIBYL Lovely

VICTOR Have you been here long?

SIBYL No, we only arrived to-day

VICTOR Another coincidence So did we

SIBYL How awfully funny

VICTOR Would you care for a cocktail?

SIBYL Oh no, thank you—really —

VICTOR There are two here on the table

[*SIBYL glances at the two empty glasses on the balustrade, and tosses her head defiantly*]

SIBYL Thanks very much, I'd love one

VICTOR Good, here you are

[*SIBYL comes over to VICTOR'S side of the terrace He hands her one and takes one himself*]

SIBYL Thank you

VICTOR [*with rather forced gaiety*] To absent friends [*He raises his glass*]

SIBYL [*raising hers*] To absent friends [*They both laugh rather mirthlessly and then sit down on the balustrade, pensively sipping their cocktails and looking at the view*] It's awfully pretty, isn't it? The moonlight, and the lights of that yacht reflected in the water —

VICTOR I wonder who it belongs to

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS

ACT II

The Scene is AMANDA'S flat in Paris A few days have elapsed since Act I The flat is charmingly furnished, its principal features being a Steinway Grand on the Left, facing slightly up stage Down stage center, a very large comfortable sofa, behind which is a small table There is also another sofa somewhere about, and one or two small tables, and a gramophone The rest can be left to the discretion and taste of the decorator

When the curtain rises it is about ten o'clock in the evening The windows are wide open, and the various street sounds of Paris can be heard but not very loudly as the apartment is high up

AMANDA and ELYOT are seated opposite one another at the table They have finished dinner and are dallying over coffee and liqueurs AMANDA is wearing pajamas, and ELYOT a comfortable dressing-gown

AMANDA I'm glad we let Louise go I am afraid she is going to have a cold

ELYOT Going to have a cold, she's been grunting and snorting all the evening like a whole herd of bison

AMANDA [*thoughtfully*] Bison never sounds right to me somehow I have a feeling it ought to be bisons, a flock of bisons

ELYOT You might say a covey of bisons, or even a school of bisons

AMANDA Yes, lovely The Royal London School of Bisons Do you think Louise is happy at home?

ELYOT No, profoundly miserable

AMANDA Family beastly to her?

ELYOT [*with conviction*] Absolutely vile Knock her about dreadfully I expect, make her eat the most disgusting food, and pull her fringe

AMANDA [*laughing*] Oh, poor Louise

ELYOT Well, you know what the French are

AMANDA Oh yes, indeed I know what the Hungarians are, too

ELYOT What are they?

AMANDA Very wistful It's all those Pretzles, I shouldn't wonder

ELYOT And the Poostza, I always felt the Poostza was far too big, Danube or no Danube

AMANDA Have you ever crossed the Sahara on a Camel?

ELYOT Frequently When I was a boy we used to do it all the time My Grandmother had a lovely seat on a camel

AMANDA There's no doubt about it, foreign travel's the thing

ELYOT Would you like some brandy?

AMANDA Just a little

[*He pours some into her glass and some into his own*]

ELYOT I'm glad we didn't go out to-night

AMANDA Or last night

ELYOT Or the night before

AMANDA There's no reason to, really, when we're cosy here

ELYOT Exactly

AMANDA It's nice, isn't it?

ELYOT Strangely peacetul It's an awfully bad reflection on our characters We ought to be absolutely tortured with conscience

AMANDA We are, every now and then

ELYOT Not nearly enough

AMANDA We sent Victor and Sibyl a nice note from wherever it was, what more can they want?

ELYOT You're even more ruthless than I am

AMANDA I don't believe in crying over my bridge before I've eaten it

ELYOT Very sensible

AMANDA Personally I feel grateful for a miraculous escape I know now that I should never have been happy with Victor I was a fool ever to consider it

ELYOT You did a little more than consider it

AMANDA Well, you can't talk

ELYOT I wonder whether they met each other, or whether they've been suffering alone

AMANDA Oh dear, don't let's go on about it, it really does make one feel rather awful

ELYOT I suppose one or other or both of them will turn up here eventually

AMANDA Bound to, it won't be very nice, will it?

ELYOT [*cheerfully*] Perfectly horrible

AMANDA Do you realize that we're living in sin?

ELYOT Not according to the Catholics, Catholics don't recognize divorce We're married as much as ever we were Catholics

AMANDA Yes, dear, but we're not Catholics

ELYOT Never mind, it's nice to think they'd sort of back us up We were married in the eyes of heaven, and we still are

AMANDA We may be all right in the

eyes of Heaven, but we look like being in the hell of a mess socially

ELYOT Who cares?

AMANDA Are we going to marry again, after Victor and Sibyl divorce us?

ELYOT I suppose so What do you think?

AMANDA I feel rather scared of marriage really

ELYOT It is a frowsy business

AMANDA I believe it was just the fact of our being married, and clamped together publicly, that wrecked us before

ELYOT That, and not knowing how to manage each other

AMANDA Do you think we know how to manage each other now?

ELYOT This week's been very successful We've hardly used Solomon Isaacs at all

AMANDA Solomon Isaacs is so long, let's shorten it to Sollocks

ELYOT All right

AMANDA Darling, you do look awfully sweet in your little dressing-gown

ELYOT Yes, it's pretty ravishing, isn't it?

AMANDA Do you mind if I come round and kiss you?

ELYOT A pleasure, Lady Agatha

[*AMANDA comes round the table, kisses him, picks up the coffee pot, and returns to her chair*]

AMANDA What fools we were to subject ourselves to five years' unnecessary suffering

ELYOT Perhaps it wasn't unnecessary, perhaps it mellowed and perfected us like beautiful ripe fruit

AMANDA When we were together, did you really think I was unfaithful to you?

ELYOT Yes, practically every day

AMANDA I thought you were too, often I used to torture myself with visions of your bouncing about on divans with awful widows

ELYOT Why widows?

AMANDA I was thinking of Claire Lavenham really

ELYOT Oh Claire

AMANDA [*sharply*] What did you say "Oh Claire" like that for? It sounded far too careless to me

ELYOT [*wistfully*] What a lovely creature she was

AMANDA Lovely, lovely, lovely!

ELYOT [*blowing her a kiss*] Darling!

AMANDA Did you ever have an affair with her? Afterwards I mean?

ELYOT Why do you want to know?

AMANDA Curiosity, I suppose

ELYOT Dangerous

AMANDA Oh not now, not dangerous now I wouldn't expect you to have been celibate during those five years, any more than I was

ELYOT [*jumping*] What?

AMANDA After all, Claire was undeniably attractive. A trifle over-vivacious I always thought, but that was probably because she was fundamentally stupid

ELYOT What do you mean about not being celibate during those five years?

AMANDA What do you think I mean?

ELYOT Oh God!

[*He looks down miserably*]

AMANDA What's the matter?

ELYOT You know perfectly well what's the matter

AMANDA [*gently*] You mustn't be unreasonable, I was only trying to stamp out the memory of you. I expect your affairs well outnumbered mine, anyhow

ELYOT That is a little different. I'm a man

AMANDA Excuse me a moment while I get a caraway biscuit and change my crinoline

ELYOT It doesn't suit women to be promiscuous

AMANDA It doesn't suit men for women to be promiscuous

ELYOT [*with sarcasm*] Very modern, dear, really your advanced views quite startle me

AMANDA Don't be cross, Elyot, I haven't been so dreadfully loose actually. Five years is a long time, and even if I did nip off with some one every now and again, they were none of them very serious

ELYOT [*rising from the table and walking away*] Oh, do stop it please—

AMANDA Well, what about you?

ELYOT Do you want me to tell you?

AMANDA No, no, I don't—I take everything back—I don't

ELYOT [*viciously*] I was madly in love with a woman in South Africa

AMANDA Did she have a ring through her nose?

ELYOT Don't be revolting

AMANDA We're tormenting one another. Sit down, sweet, I'm scared

ELYOT [*slowly*] Very well

[*He sits down thoughtfully*]

AMANDA We should have said Sollocks ages ago

ELYOT We're in love all right

AMANDA Don't say it so bitterly. Let's try to get the best out of it this time, instead of the worst

ELYOT [*stretching his hand across the table*] Hand, please

AMANDA [*clasping it*] Here

ELYOT More comfortable?

AMANDA Much more

ELYOT [*after a slight pause*] Are you engaged for this dance?

AMANDA Funnily enough I was, but my partner was suddenly taken ill

ELYOT [*rising and going to the gramophone*] It's this damned smallpox epidemic

AMANDA No, as a matter of fact it was kidney trouble

ELYOT You'll dance it with me. I hope?

AMANDA [*rising*] I shall be charmed

ELYOT [*as they dance*] Quite a good floor, isn't it?

AMANDA Yes, I think it needs a little Borax

ELYOT I love Borax

AMANDA Is that the Grand Duchess Olga lying under the piano?

ELYOT Yes, her husband died a few weeks ago, you know, on his way back from Pulborough. So sad

AMANDA What on earth was he doing in Pulborough?

ELYOT Nobody knows exactly, but there have been the usual stories

AMANDA I see

ELYOT Delightful parties. Lady Bundle always gives, doesn't she?

AMANDA Entrancing. Such a dear old lady

ELYOT And so gay! Did you notice her at supper blowing all those shrimps through her ear trumpet?

[*The tune comes to an end. AMANDA sits on the edge of the sofa, pensively*]

ELYOT What are you thinking about?

AMANDA Nothing in particular

ELYOT Come on, I know that face

AMANDA Poor Sibyl

ELYOT Sibyl?

AMANDA Yes, I suppose she loves you terribly

ELYOT Not as much as all that, she didn't have a chance to get really under way

AMANDA I expect she's dreadfully unhappy

ELYOT Oh, do shut up, Amanda. We've had all that out before

AMANDA We've certainly been pretty busy trying to justify ourselves

ELYOT It isn't a question of justifying ourselves—it's the true values of the situation that are really important. The moment we saw one another again we knew

it was no use going on. We knew it instantly really, although we tried to pretend to ourselves that we didn't. What we've got to be thankful for is that we made the break straight away, and not later.

AMANDA You think we should have done it anyhow?

ELYOT Of course, and things would have been in a worse mess than they are now.

AMANDA And what if we'd never happened to meet again? Would you have been quite happy with Sibyl?

ELYOT I expect so.

AMANDA Oh, Elyot!

ELYOT You needn't look so stricken. It would have been the same with you and Victor. Life would have been smooth, and amicable, and quite charming, wouldn't it?

AMANDA Poor dear Victor. He certainly did love me.

ELYOT Splendid.

AMANDA When I met him I was so lonely and depressed, I felt that I was getting old, and crumbling away unwanted.

ELYOT It certainly is horrid when one begins to crumble.

AMANDA [*wistfully*] He used to look at me hopelessly like a lovely spaniel, and I sort of melted like snow in the sunlight.

ELYOT That must have been an edifying spectacle.

AMANDA Victor really had a great charm.

ELYOT You must tell me all about it.

AMANDA He had a positive mania for looking after me, and protecting me.

ELYOT That would have died down in time, dear.

AMANDA You mustn't be rude, there's no necessity to be rude.

ELYOT I wasn't in the least rude, I merely made a perfectly rational statement.

AMANDA Your voice was decidedly bitter.

ELYOT Victor had glorious legs, hadn't he? And fascinating ears.

AMANDA Don't be silly.

ELYOT He probably looked radiant in the morning, all flushed and tumbled on the pillow.

AMANDA I never saw him on the pillow.

ELYOT I'm surprised to hear it.

AMANDA [*angrily*] Elyot!

ELYOT There's no need to be cross.

AMANDA What did you mean by that?

ELYOT I'm sick of listening to you yap, yap, yap, yap, yap, yapping about Victor.

AMANDA Now listen, Elyot, once and for all—

ELYOT Oh my dear, Sollocks! Sollocks!—two minutes—Sollocks.

AMANDA But—

ELYOT [*firmly*] Sollocks! [*They sit in dead silence, looking at each other. AMANDA makes a sign that she wants a cigarette. ELYOT gets up, hands her the box, and lights one for her and himself. AMANDA rises and walks over to the window, and stands there, looking out for a moment. Presently ELYOT joins her. She slips her arm through his, and they kiss lightly. They draw the curtains and then come down and sit side by side on the sofa. ELYOT looks at his watch. AMANDA raises her eyebrows at him and he nods, then they both sigh, audibly.*] That was a near thing.

AMANDA It was my fault. I'm terribly sorry, darling.

ELYOT I was very irritating, I know. I was. I'm sure Victor was awfully nice, and you're perfectly right to be sweet about him.

AMANDA That's downright handsome of you, Sweetheart! [*She kisses him.*]

ELYOT [*leaning back with her on the sofa*] I think I love you more than ever before. Isn't it ridiculous? Put your feet up.

[*She puts her legs across his, and they snuggle back together in the corner of the sofa, his head resting on her shoulder.*]

AMANDA Comfortable?

ELYOT Almost, wait a moment.

[*He struggles a bit and then settles down with a sigh.*]

AMANDA How long, Oh Lord, how long?

ELYOT [*drowsily*] What do you mean, "How long, Oh Lord, how long?"

AMANDA This is far too perfect to last.

ELYOT You have no faith, that's what's wrong with you.

AMANDA Absolutely none.

ELYOT Don't you believe in—?

[*He nods upwards.*]

AMANDA No, do you?

ELYOT [*shaking his head*] No. What about—? [*He points downwards.*]

AMANDA Oh dear no.

ELYOT Don't you believe in anything?

AMANDA Oh yes, I believe in being kind to every one, and giving money to

old beggar women, and being as gay as possible

ELYOT What about after we're dead?

AMANDA I think a rather gloomy merging into everything, don't you?

ELYOT I hope not, I'm a bad merger

AMANDA You won't know a thing about it

ELYOT I hope for a glorious oblivion, like being under gas

AMANDA I always dream the most peculiar things under gas

ELYOT Would you be young always? If you could choose?

AMANDA No, I don't think so, not if it meant having awful bull's glands popped into me

ELYOT Cows for you, dear Bulls for me

AMANDA We certainly live in a marvelous age

ELYOT Too marvelous It's all right if you happen to be a specialist at something, then you're too concentrated to pay attention to all the other things going on But, for the ordinary observer, it's too much

AMANDA [snuggling closer] Far, far too much

ELYOT Take the radio for instance

AMANDA Oh darling, don't let's take the radio

ELYOT Well, aeroplanes then, and Cosmic Atoms, and Television, and those gland injections we were talking about just now

AMANDA It must be so nasty for the poor animals, being experimented on

ELYOT Not when the experiments are successful Why, in Vienna I believe you can see whole lines of decrepit old rats carrying on like Tiller Girls

AMANDA [laughing] Oh, how very, very sweet

ELYOT [burying his face in her shoulder] I do love you so

AMANDA Don't blow, dear heart, it gives me the shivers

ELYOT [trying to kiss her] Swivel your face round a bit more

AMANDA [obliging] That better?

ELYOT [kissing her lingeringly] Very nice, thank you kindly

AMANDA [twining her arms round his neck] Darling, you're so terribly, terribly dear, and sweet, and attractive

[She pulls his head down to her again and they kiss lovingly]

ELYOT [softly] We were raving mad, ever to part, even for an instant

AMANDA Utter imbeciles

ELYOT I realized it almost immediately, didn't you?

AMANDA Long before we got our decree

ELYOT My heart broke on that damned trip round the world I saw such beautiful things, darling Moonlight shining on old Temples, strange barbaric dances in jungle villages, scarlet flamingoes flying over deep, deep blue water Breathlessly lovely, and completely unexciting because you weren't there to see them with me

AMANDA [kissing him again] Take me, please, take me at once, let's make up for lost time

ELYOT Next week?

AMANDA To-morrow

ELYOT Done

AMANDA I must see those dear flamingoes [There is a pause] Eight years all told, we've loved each other Three married and five divorced

ELYOT Angel Angel Angel

[He kisses her passionately]

AMANDA [struggling slightly] No, Elyot, stop now, stop—

ELYOT Why should I stop? You know you adore being made love to

AMANDA [through his kisses] It's so soon after dinner

ELYOT [jumping up rather angrily] You really do say most awful things

AMANDA [tidying her hair] I don't see anything particularly awful about that

ELYOT No sense of glamour, no sense of glamour at all

AMANDA It's difficult to feel really glamorous with a crick in the neck

ELYOT Why didn't you say you had a crick in your neck?

AMANDA [sweetly] It's gone now

ELYOT How convenient

[He lights a cigarette]

AMANDA [holding out her hand] I want one, please

ELYOT [throwing her one] Here

AMANDA Match?

ELYOT [impatiently] Wait a minute, can't you?

AMANDA Chivalrous little love

ELYOT [throwing the matches at her]. Here

AMANDA [coldly] Thank you very much indeed

[There is a silence for a moment]

ELYOT You really can be more irritating than any one in the world

AMANDA I fail to see what I've done that's so terribly irritating

ELYOT You have no tact

AMANDA Tact! You have no consideration

ELYOT [*walking up and down*] Too soon after dinner indeed

AMANDA Yes, much too soon

ELYOT That sort of remark shows rather a common sort of mind I'm afraid

AMANDA Oh it does, does it?

ELYOT Very unpleasant, makes me shudder

AMANDA Making all this fuss just because your silly vanity is a little upset

ELYOT Vanity! What do you mean, vanity?

AMANDA You can't bear the thought that there are certain moments when our chemical, what d'you call 'ems, don't fuse properly

ELYOT [*derisively*] Chemical what d'you call 'ems! Please try to be more explicit

AMANDA You know perfectly well what I mean, and don't you try to patronize me

ELYOT [*loudly*] Now look here, Amanda—

AMANDA [*suddenly*] Darling! Sollocks! Oh, for God's sake, Sollocks!

ELYOT But listen—

AMANDA Sollocks, Sollocks, Oh dear—triple Sollocks!

[*They stand looking at one another in silence for a moment, then AMANDA flings herself down on the sofa and buries her face in the cushions ELYOT looks at her, then goes over to the piano He sits down and begins to play idly AMANDA raises her head, screws herself round on the sofa, and lies there listening ELYOT blows a kiss to her and goes on playing He starts to sing softly to her, never taking his eyes off her When he has finished the little refrain, whatever it was, he still continues to play it looking at her*]

AMANDA Big romantic stuff, darling

ELYOT [*smiling*] Yes, big romantic stuff

[*He wanders off into another tune*

AMANDA sits up crossed legged on the sofa, and begins to sing it, then, still singing, she comes over and perches on the piano They sing several old refrains from dead and gone musical comedies finishing with the song that brought them together again in the first Act Finally AMANDA comes down and sits next to him on the piano stool, they both therefore have their backs half turned to the

audience She rests her head on his shoulder, until finally his fingers drop off the keys, and they melt into one another's arms]

ELYOT [*after a moment*] You're the most thrilling, exciting woman that was ever born

AMANDA [*standing up, and brushing her hand lightly over his mouth*] Dearest, dearest heart—

[*He catches at her hand and kisses it, and then her arm, until he is standing up, embracing her ardently She struggles a little, half laughing, and breaks away, but he catches her, and they finish up on the sofa again, clasped in each other's arms, both completely given up to the passions of the moment, until the telephone bell rings violently, and they both spring apart*]

ELYOT Good God!

AMANDA Do you think it's them?

ELYOT I wonder

AMANDA Nobody knows we're here except Freda, and she wouldn't ring up

ELYOT It must be them then

AMANDA What are we to do?

ELYOT [*suddenly*] We're all right darling, aren't we—whatever happens?

AMANDA Now and always, sweet

ELYOT I don't care then

[*He gets up and goes defiantly over to the telephone, which has been ringing incessantly during the little preceding scene*]

AMANDA It was bound to come sooner or later

ELYOT [*at telephone*] Hallo—hallo—what—comment? Madame, qui? 'allo—'allo—oui, c'est ça Oh, Madame Duvalon—oui, oui oui [*He puts his hand over the mouthpiece*] It's only somebody wanting to talk to the dear Madame Duvalon

AMANDA Who's she?

ELYOT I haven't the faintest idea [*At telephone*] Je regrette beaucoup, Monsieur, mais Madame Duvalon viens de partir—cette après-midi, pour Madagascar [*He hangs up the telephone*] Whew, that gave me a fright

AMANDA It sent shivers up my spine

ELYOT What shall we do if they suddenly walk in on us?

AMANDA Behave exquisitely

ELYOT With the most perfect poise?

AMANDA Certainly, I shall probably do a Court curtsey

ELYOT [*sitting on the edge of the sofa*] Things that ought to matter dread

fully, don't matter at all when one's happy, do they?

AMANDA What is so horrible is that one can't stay happy

ELYOT Darling, don't say that

AMANDA It's true The whole business is a very poor joke

ELYOT Meaning that sacred and beautiful thing, love?

AMANDA Yes, meaning just that

ELYOT [*striding up and down the room dramatically*] What does it all mean, that's what I ask myself in my ceaseless quest for ultimate truth Dear God, what does it all mean?

AMANDA Don't laugh at me, I'm serious

ELYOT [*seriously*] You mustn't be serious, my dear one, it's just what they want

AMANDA Who's they?

ELYOT All the futile moralists who try to make life unbearable Laugh at them Be flippant Laugh at everything, all their sacred shibboleths Flippancy brings out the acid in their damned sweetness and light

AMANDA If I laugh at everything, I must laugh at us too

ELYOT Certainly you must We're figures of fun all right

AMANDA How long will it last, this ludicrous, overbearing love of ours?

ELYOT Who knows?

AMANDA Shall we always want to bicker and fight?

ELYOT No, that desire will fade, along with our passion

AMANDA Oh, dear, shall we like that?

ELYOT It all depends on how well we've played

AMANDA What happens if one of us dies? Does the one that's left still laugh?

ELYOT Yes, yes, with all his might

AMANDA [*wistfully clutching his hand*] That's serious enough, isn't it?

ELYOT No, no, it isn't Death's very laughable, such a cunning little mystery All done with mirrors

AMANDA Darling, I believe you're talking nonsense

ELYOT So is every one else in the long run Let's be superficial and pity the poor Philosophers Let's blow trumpets and squeakers, and enjoy the party as much as we can, like very small, quite idiotic school-children Let's savor the delight of the moment Come and kiss me, darling, before your body rots, and worms pop in and out of your eye sockets

AMANDA Elyot, worms don't pop

ELYOT [*kissing her*] I don't mind what you do—see? You can paint yourself bright green all over, and dance naked in the Place Vendome, and rush off madly with all the men in the world, and I shan't say a word, as long as you love me best

AMANDA Thank you, dear The same applies to you, except that if I catch you so much as looking at another woman, I'll kill you

ELYOT Do you remember that awful scene we had in Venice?

AMANDA Which particular one?

ELYOT The one when you bought that little painted wooden snake on the Piazza, and put it on my bed

AMANDA Oh, Charles That was his name, Charles He did wriggle so beautifully

ELYOT Horrible thing, I hated it

AMANDA Yes, I know you did You threw it out of the window into the Grand Canal I don't think I'll ever forgive you for that

ELYOT How long did the row last?

AMANDA It went on intermittently for days

ELYOT The worst one was in Cannes when your curling irons burnt a hole in my new dressing-gown [*He laughs*]

AMANDA It burnt my comb, too, and all the towels in the bathroom

ELYOT That was a rouser, wasn't it?

AMANDA That was the first time you ever hit me

ELYOT I didn't hit you very hard

AMANDA The manager came in and found us rolling on the floor, biting and scratching like panthers Oh dear, oh dear— [*She laughs helplessly*]

ELYOT I shall never forget his face

[*They both collapse with laughter*]

AMANDA How ridiculous, how utterly, utterly ridiculous!

ELYOT We were very much younger then

AMANDA And very much sillier

ELYOT As a matter of fact, the real cause of that row was Peter Burden

AMANDA You knew there was nothing in that

ELYOT I didn't know anything of the sort, you took presents from him

AMANDA Presents, only a trivial little brooch

ELYOT I remember it well, bristling with diamonds In the worst possible taste

AMANDA Not at all, it was very pretty I still have it, and I wear it often

ELYOT You went out of your way to torture me over Peter Burden

AMANDA No, I didn't, you worked the whole thing up in your jealous imagination

ELYOT You must admit that he was in love with you, wasn't he?

AMANDA Just a little perhaps Nothing serious

ELYOT You let him kiss you You said you did

AMANDA Well, what of it?

ELYOT What of it?

AMANDA It gave him a lot of pleasure, and it didn't hurt me

ELYOT What about me?

AMANDA If you hadn't been so suspicious and nosy you'd never have known a thing about it

ELYOT That's a nice point of view, I must say

AMANDA Oh, dear, I'm bored with this conversation

ELYOT So am I, bored stiff [*He goes over to the table*] Want some brandy?

AMANDA No, thanks

ELYOT I'll have a little, I think

AMANDA I don't see why you want it, you've already had two glasses

ELYOT No particular reason Anyhow, they were very small ones

AMANDA It seems so silly to go on, and on, and on with a thing

ELYOT [*pouring himself out a glass-ful*] You can hardly call three liqueur glasses in a whole evening going on, and on, and on

AMANDA It's become a habit with you

ELYOT You needn't be so grand, just because you don't happen to want any yourself at the moment

AMANDA Don't be so stupid

ELYOT [*irritably*] Really Amanda—

AMANDA What?

ELYOT Nothing [*AMANDA sits down on the sofa, and, taking a small mirror from her bag, gazes at her face critically, and then uses some lipstick and powder A trifle nastily*] Going out somewhere, dear?

AMANDA No, just making myself fascinating for you

ELYOT That reply has broken my heart

AMANDA The woman's job is to allure the man Watch me a minute, will you?

ELYOT As a matter of fact that's perfectly true

AMANDA Oh, no, it isn't

ELYOT Yes it is

AMANDA [*snappily*] Oh be quiet

ELYOT It's a pity you didn't have any more brandy, it might have made you a little less disagreeable

AMANDA It doesn't seem to have worked such wonders with you

ELYOT Snap, snap, snap, like a little adder

AMANDA Adders don't snap, they sting

ELYOT Nonsense, they have a little bag of venom behind their fangs and they snap

AMANDA They sting

ELYOT They snap

AMANDA [*with exasperation*] I don't care, do you understand? I don't care I don't mind if they bark, and roll about like hoops

ELYOT [*after a slight pause*] Did you see much of Peter Burden after our divorce?

AMANDA Yes, I did, quite a lot

ELYOT I suppose you let him kiss you a good deal more then

AMANDA Mind your own business

ELYOT You must have had a riotous time [*AMANDA doesn't answer, so he stalks about the room*] No restraint at all—very enjoyable—you never had much anyhow

AMANDA You're quite insufferable, I expect it's because you're drunk

ELYOT I'm not in the least drunk

AMANDA You always had a weak head

ELYOT I think I mentioned once before that I have only had three minute liqueur glasses of brandy the whole evening long A child of two couldn't get drunk on that

AMANDA On the contrary, a child of two could get violently drunk on only one glass of brandy

ELYOT Very interesting How about a child of four, and a child of six, and a child of nine?

AMANDA [*turning her head away*] Oh do shut up

ELYOT [*witheringly*] We might get up a splendid little debate about that, you know, Intemperate Tots

AMANDA Not very funny, dear, you'd better have some more brandy

ELYOT Very good idea, I will

[*He pours out another glass and gulps it down defiantly*]

AMANDA Ridiculous ass

ELYOT I beg your pardon?

AMANDA I said ridiculous ass!

ELYOT [*with great dignity*] Thank

you [*There is a silence AMANDA gets up, and turns the gramophone on*] You'd better turn that off, I think

AMANDA [*coldly*] Why?

ELYOT It's very late and it will annoy the people upstairs

AMANDA There aren't any people upstairs It's a photographer's studio

ELYOT There are people downstairs, I suppose?

AMANDA They're away in Tunis

ELYOT This is no time of the year for Tunis [*He turns the gramophone off*]

AMANDA [*icily*] Turn it on again, please

ELYOT I'll do no such thing

AMANDA Very well, if you insist on being boorish and idiotic

[*She gets up and turns it on again*]

ELYOT Turn it off It's driving me mad

AMANDA You're far too temperamental Try to control yourself

ELYOT Turn it off

AMANDA I won't [*ELYOT rushes at the gramophone AMANDA tries to ward him off They struggle silently for a moment, then the needle screeches across the record*] There now, you've ruined the record

[*She takes it off and scrutinizes it*]

ELYOT Good job, too

AMANDA Disagreeable pig

ELYOT [*suddenly stricken with remorse*] Amanda darling—Sollocks

AMANDA [*furiously*] Sollocks yourself

[*She breaks the record over his head*]

ELYOT [*staggering*] You spiteful little beast

[*He slaps her face She screams loudly and hurls herself sobbing with rage on to the sofa with her face buried in the cushions*]

AMANDA [*wailing*] Oh, oh, oh—

ELYOT I'm sorry, I didn't mean it—I'm sorry, darling, I swear I didn't mean it

AMANDA Go away, go away, I hate you

[*ELYOT kneels on the sofa and tries to pull her round to look at him*]

ELYOT Amanda—listen—listen—

AMANDA [*turning suddenly, and fetching him a welt across the face*] Listen indeed, I'm sick and tired of listening to you, you damned sadistic bully!

ELYOT [*with great grandeur*] Thank you [*He stalks towards the door, in stately silence AMANDA throws a cushion at him, which misses him and knocks*

a lamp and a vase on the side table ELYOT laughs falsely] A pretty display, I must say

AMANDA [*wildly*] Stop laughing like that

ELYOT [*continuing*] Very amusing indeed

AMANDA [*losing control*] Stop—stop—stop— [*She rushes at him, he grabs her hands and they sway about the room, until he manages to twist her round by the arms so that she faces him, closely, quivering with fury*] I hate you, do you hear? You're conceited, and overbearing, and utterly impossible!

ELYOT [*shouting her down*] You're a vile-tempered loose-living wicked little beast, and I never want to see you again so long as I live!

[*He flings her away from him, she staggers, and falls against a chair They stand gasping at one another in silence, for a moment*]

AMANDA [*very quietly*] This is the end, do you understand? The end, finally and forever

[*She goes to the door, which opens on to the landing, and wrenches it open He rushes after her and clutches her wrist*]

ELYOT You're not going like this

AMANDA Oh yes I am

ELYOT You're not

AMANDA I am, let go of me— [*He pulls her away from the door, and once more they struggle This time a standard lamp crashes to the ground AMANDA, breathlessly, as they fight*] You're a cruel fiend, and I hate and loathe you, thank God I've realized in time what you're really like, marry you again, never, never, never I'd rather die in torment—

ELYOT [*at the same time*] Shut up, shut up I wouldn't marry you again if you came crawling to me on your bended knees, you're a mean, evil-minded, little vampire—I hope to God I never set eyes on you again as long as I live—

[*At this point in the proceedings they trip over a piece of carpet, and fall on to the floor, rolling over and over in paroxysms of rage VICTOR and SIBYL enter quietly, through the open door, and stand staring at them in horror Finally AMANDA breaks free and half gets up, ELYOT grabs her leg, and she falls against a table, knocking it completely over*]

AMANDA [*screaming*] Beast, brute, swine, cad, beast, beast, brute, devil— [*She rushes back at ELYOT who is just*

rising to his feet, and gives him a stinging blow, which knocks him over again. She rushes blindly off Left, and slams the door, at the same moment that he jumps up and rushes off Right, also slamming the door. VICTOR and SIBYL advance apprehensively into the room, and sink on to the sofa—]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

The Scene is the same as Act II. It is the next morning. The time is about eight-thirty. VICTOR and SIBYL have drawn the two sofas across the doors Right, and Left, and are stretched on them, asleep. VICTOR is in front of AMANDA'S door, and SIBYL in front of ELYOT'S. The room is in chaos, as it was left the night before. As the curtain rises, there is the rattling of a key in the lock of the front door, and LOUISE enters. She is rather a frowsy-looking girl, and carries a string bag with various bundles of eatables crammed into it, notably a long roll of bread, and a lettuce. She closes the door after her, and in the half light trips over the standard lamp lying on the floor. She puts her string bag down, and gropes her way over to the window. She draws the curtains, letting sunlight stream into the room. When she looks round, she gives a little cry of horror. Then she sees VICTOR and SIBYL sleeping peacefully, and comes over and scrutinizes each of them with care, then she shakes SIBYL by the shoulder.

SIBYL [*waking*] Oh dear

LOUISE Bon jour, Madame

SIBYL [*bewildered*] What?—Oh—bon jour

LOUISE Qu'est-ce-que vous faites ici, madame?

SIBYL What—what? Wait a moment, attendez un instant—oh dear—

VICTOR [*sleepily*] What's happening? [*Jumping up*] Of course, I remember now [*He sees LOUISE*] Oh!

LOUISE [*firmly*] Bon jour, Monsieur

VICTOR Er—bon jour—What time is it?

LOUISE [*rather dully*] Eh, Monsieur?

SIBYL [*sitting up on the sofa*] Quelle heure est-il s'il vous plaît?

LOUISE C'est neuf heures moins dix madame

VICTOR What did she say?

SIBYL I think she said nearly ten o'clock

VICTOR [*taking situation in hand*] Er—voulez—er—wake—revillez Monsieur et Madame—er—toute suite?

LOUISE [*shaking her head*] Non, Monsieur. Il m'est absolument défendu de les appeler jusqu'à ce qu'ils sonnent

[*She takes her bag and goes off into the kitchen. VICTOR and SIBYL look at each other helplessly*]

SIBYL What are we to do?

VICTOR [*with determination*] Wake them ourselves

[*He goes towards AMANDA'S door*]

SIBYL No, no, wait a minute

VICTOR What's the matter?

SIBYL [*plaintively*] I couldn't face them yet, really, I couldn't, I feel dreadful

VICTOR So do I [*He wanders gloomily over to the window*] It's a lovely morning

SIBYL Lovely

[*She bursts into tears*]

VICTOR [*coming to her*] I say, don't cry

SIBYL I can't help it

VICTOR Please don't, please—

SIBYL It's all so squalid, I wish we hadn't stayed, what's the use?

VICTOR We've got to see them before we go back to England, we must get things straightened out

SIBYL [*sinking down on to the sofa*] Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, I wish I were dead

VICTOR Hush, now, hush. Remember your promise. We've got to see this through together and get it settled one way or another

SIBYL [*sniffing*] I'll try to control myself, only I'm so—so tired, I haven't slept properly for ages

VICTOR Neither have I

SIBYL If we hadn't arrived when we did, they'd have killed one another

VICTOR They must have been drunk

SIBYL She hit him

VICTOR He'd probably hit her, too, earlier on

SIBYL I'd no idea any one ever behaved like that, it's so disgusting, so degrading. Eili of all people—oh dear—

[*She almost breaks down again, but controls herself*]

VICTOR What an escape you've had!
SIBYL What an escape we've both had!

[AMANDA opens her door and looks out *She is wearing traveling clothes, and is carrying a small suitcase She jumps, upon seeing SIBYL and VICTOR*]

AMANDA Oh!—good morning

VICTOR [*with infinite reproach in his voice*] Oh, Amanda

AMANDA Will you please move this sofa, I can't get out

[VICTOR moves the sofa, and she advances into the room and goes towards the door]

VICTOR Where are you going?

AMANDA Away

VICTOR You can't

AMANDA Why not?

VICTOR I want to talk to you

AMANDA [*wearily*] What on earth is the use of that?

VICTOR I must talk to you

AMANDA Well, all I can say is, it's very inconsiderate

[*She plumps the bag down by the door and comes down to VICTOR*]

VICTOR Mandy, I—

AMANDA [*gracefully determined to rise above the situation*] I suppose you're Sibyl, how do you do? [SIBYL turns her back on her] Well, if you're going to take up that attitude, I fail to see the point of your coming here at all

SIBYL I came to see Elyot

AMANDA I've no wish to prevent you, he's in there, probably wallowing in an alcoholic stupor

VICTOR This is all very unpleasant, Amanda

AMANDA I quite agree, that's why I want to go away

VICTOR That would be shirking, this must be discussed at length

AMANDA Very well, if you insist, but not just now, I don't feel up to it Has Louise come yet?

VICTOR If Louise is the maid, she's in the kitchen

AMANDA Thank you You'd probably like some coffee, excuse me a moment

[*She goes off into the kitchen*]

SIBYL Well! How dare she?

VICTOR [*irritably*] How dare she what?

SIBYL Behave so calmly, as though nothing had happened

VICTOR I don't see what else she could have done

SIBYL Insufferable, I call it

[ELYOT opens his door and looks out]

ELYOT [*seeing them*] Oh God

[*He shuts the door again quickly*]

SIBYL Elyot—Elyot— [*She rushes over to the door and bangs on it*] Elyot—Elyot—Elyot—

ELYOT [*inside*] Go away

SIBYL [*falling on to the sofa*] Oh, oh, oh! [*She bursts into tears again*]

VICTOR Do pull yourself together, for heaven's sake

SIBYL I can't, I can't—oh, oh, oh—

[AMANDA reenters]

AMANDA I've ordered some coffee and rolls, they'll be here soon I must apologize for the room being so untidy

[*She picks up a cushion, and pats it into place on the sofa There is a silence except for SIBYL'S sobs AMANDA looks at her, and then at VICTOR, then she goes off into her room again, and shuts the door*]

VICTOR It's no use crying like that, it doesn't do any good

[*After a moment, during which SIBYL makes renewed efforts to control her tears, ELYOT opens the door immediately behind her, pushes the sofa, with her on it, out of the way, and walks towards the front door He is in traveling clothes, and carrying a small suitcase*]

SIBYL [*rushing after him*] Elyot, where are you going?

ELYOT Canada

SIBYL You can't go like this, you can't

ELYOT I see no point in staying

VICTOR You owe it to Sibyl to stay

ELYOT How do you do? I don't think we've met before

SIBYL You must stay, you've got to stay

ELYOT Very well, if you insist [*He plumps his bag down*] I'm afraid the room is in rather a mess Have you seen the maid Louise?

VICTOR She's in the kitchen

ELYOT Good I'll order some coffee

[*He makes a movement towards the kitchen*]

VICTOR [*stopping him*] No, your—er—my—er—Amanda has already ordered it

ELYOT Oh, I'm glad the old girl's up and about

VICTOR We've got to get things straightened out, you know

ELYOT [*looking around the room*] Yes, it's pretty awful We'll get the concierge up from downstairs

[*She tosses her head at ELYOT, and AMANDA drags her off*]

VICTOR [*belligerently*] Now then!

ELYOT Now then what?

VICTOR Are you going to take back those things you said to Amanda?

ELYOT Certainly, I'll take back anything, if only you'll stop bellowing at me

VICTOR [*contemptuously*] You're a coward, too

ELYOT They want us to fight, don't you see?

VICTOR No, I don't, why should they?

ELYOT Primitive feminine instincts—warring males—very enjoyable

VICTOR You think you're very clever, don't you?

ELYOT I think I'm a bit cleverer than you, but apparently that's not saying much

VICTOR [*violently*] What?

ELYOT Oh, do sit down

VICTOR I will not

ELYOT Well, if you'll excuse me, I will, I'm extremely tired

[*He sits down*]

VICTOR Oh, for God's sake, behave like a man

ELYOT [*patently*] Listen a minute, all this belligerency is very right and proper and highly traditional, but if only you'll think for a moment, you'll see that it won't get us very far

VICTOR To hell with all that

ELYOT I should like to explain that if you hit me, I shall certainly hit you, probably equally hard, if not harder I'm just as strong as you I should imagine Then you'd hit me again, and I'd hit you again, and we'd go on until one or the other was knocked out Now if you'll explain to me satisfactorily how all that can possibly improve the situation, I'll tear off my coat, and we'll go at one another hammer and tongs, immediately

VICTOR It would ease my mind

ELYOT Only if you won

VICTOR I should win all right

ELYOT Want to try?

VICTOR Yes

ELYOT [*jumping up*] Here goes then — [*He tears off his coat*]

VICTOR Just a moment

ELYOT Well?

VICTOR What did you mean about them wanting us to fight?

ELYOT It would be balm to their vanity

VICTOR Do you love Amanda?

ELYOT Is this a battle or a discus-

sion? If it's the latter I shall put on my coat again, I don't want to catch a chill

VICTOR Answer my question, please

ELYOT Have a cigarette?

VICTOR [*stormily*] Answer my question

ELYOT If you analyze it, it's rather a silly question

VICTOR Do you love Amanda?

ELYOT [*confidentially*] Not very much this morning, to be perfectly frank, I'd like to wring her neck Do you love her?

VICTOR That's beside the point

ELYOT On the contrary, it's the crux of the whole affair If you do love her still, you can forgive her, and live with her in peace and harmony until you're ninety-eight

VICTOR You're apparently even more of a cad than I thought you were

ELYOT You are completely in the right over the whole business—don't imagine I'm not perfectly conscious of that

VICTOR I'm glad

ELYOT It's all very unfortunate

VICTOR Unfortunate! My God!

ELYOT It might have been worse

VICTOR I'm glad you think so

ELYOT I do wish you'd stop being so glad about everything

VICTOR What do you intend to do? That's what I want to know What do you intend to do?

ELYOT [*suddenly serious*] I don't know, I don't care

VICTOR I suppose you realize that you've broken that poor little woman's heart?

ELYOT Which poor little woman?

VICTOR Sibyl, of course

ELYOT Oh, come now, not as bad as that She'll get over it, and forget all about me

VICTOR I sincerely hope so for her sake

ELYOT Amanda will forget all about me too Everybody will forget all about me I might just as well lie down and die in fearful pain and suffering, nobody would care

VICTOR Don't talk such rot

ELYOT You must forgive me for taking rather a gloomy view of everything but the fact is, I suddenly feel slightly depressed

VICTOR I intend to divorce Amanda naming you as co-respondent

ELYOT Very well

VICTOR And Sibyl will divorce you

for Amanda It would be foolish of either of you to attempt any defense

ELYOT Quite

VICTOR And the sooner you marry Amanda again, the better

ELYOT I'm not going to marry Amanda

VICTOR What?

ELYOT She's a vile-tempered wicked woman

VICTOR You should have thought of that before

ELYOT I did think of it before

VICTOR [*firmly*] You've got to marry her

ELYOT I'd rather marry a ravening leopard

VICTOR [*angrily*] Now look here I'm sick of all this shilly-shallying You're getting off a good deal more lightly than you deserve, you can consider yourself damned lucky I didn't shoot you

ELYOT [*with sudden vehemence*] Well, if you'd had a spark of manliness in you, you would have shot me You're all fuss and fume, one of these cotton-wool Englishmen I despise you

VICTOR [*through clenched teeth*] You despise me?

ELYOT Yes, utterly You're nothing but a rampaging gas bag!

[*He goes off into his room and slams the door, leaving VICTOR speechless with fury, AMANDA and SIBYL reenter*]

AMANDA [*brightly*] Well, what's happened?

VICTOR [*sullenly*] Nothing's happened

AMANDA You ought to be ashamed to admit it

SIBYL Where's Elyot?

VICTOR In there

AMANDA What's he doing?

VICTOR [*turning angrily away*] How do I know what he's doing?

AMANDA If you were half the man I thought you were, he'd be bandaging himself

SIBYL [*with defiance*] Elyot's just as strong as Victor

AMANDA [*savagely*] I should like it proved

SIBYL There's no need to be so vindictive

AMANDA You were abusing Elyot like a pick-pocket to me a little while ago, now you are standing up for him

SIBYL I'm beginning to suspect that he wasn't quite so much to blame as I thought

AMANDA Oh really?

SIBYL You certainly have a very unpleasant temper

AMANDA It's a little difficult to keep up with your rapid changes of front, but you're young and inexperienced, so I forgive you freely

SIBYL [*heatedly*] Seeing the depths of degradation to which age and experience have brought you, I'm glad I'm as I am!

AMANDA [*with great grandeur*] That was exceedingly rude I think you'd better go away somewhere

[*She waves her hand vaguely*]

SIBYL After all, Elyot is my husband

AMANDA Take him with you, by all means

SIBYL If you're not very careful, I will! [*She goes over to ELYOT'S door and bangs on it*] Elyot—Elyot—

ELYOT [*inside*] What is it?

SIBYL Let me in Please, please, let me in, I want to speak to you!

AMANDA Heaven preserve me from nice women!

SIBYL Your own reputation ought to do that

AMANDA [*irritably*] Oh, go to hell!

[*ELYOT opens the door, and SIBYL disappears inside, AMANDA looks at VICTOR, who is standing with his back turned, staring out of the window, then she wanders about the room, making rather inadequate little attempts to tidy up She glances at VICTOR again*]

AMANDA Victor

VICTOR [*without turning*] What?

AMANDA [*sadly*] Nothing

[*She begins to wrestle with one of the sofas in an effort to get it in place*]

VICTOR turns, sees her, and comes down and helps her, in silence]

VICTOR Where does it go?

AMANDA Over there [*After they have placed it, AMANDA sits on the edge of it and gasps a little*]

Thank you, Victor

VICTOR Don't mention it

AMANDA [*after a pause*] What did you say to Elyot?

VICTOR I told him he was beneath contempt

AMANDA Good

VICTOR I think you must be mad, Amanda

AMANDA I've often thought that myself

VICTOR I feel completely lost, completely bewildered

AMANDA I don't blame you I don't feel any too cosy

VICTOR Had you been drinking last night?

AMANDA Certainly not!

VICTOR Had Elyot been drinking?

AMANDA Yes—gallons

VICTOR Used he to drink before? When you were married to him?

AMANDA Yes, terribly Night after night he'd come home roaring and hic-coughing

VICTOR Disgusting!

AMANDA Yes, wasn't it?

VICTOR Did he really strike you last night?

AMANDA Repeatedly I'm bruised beyond recognition

VICTOR [*suspecting slight exaggeration*] Amanda!

AMANDA [*putting her hand on his arm*] Oh, Victor, I'm most awfully sorry to have given you so much trouble, really I am! I've behaved badly, I know, but something strange happened to me I can't explain it, there's no excuse, but I am ashamed of having made you unhappy

VICTOR I can't understand it at all I've tried to, but I can't It all seems so unlike you

AMANDA It isn't really unlike me, that's the trouble I ought never to have married you, I'm a bad lot

VICTOR Amanda!

AMANDA Don't contradict me I know I'm a bad lot

VICTOR I wasn't going to contradict you

AMANDA Victor!

VICTOR You appal me—absolutely!

AMANDA Go on, go on, I deserve it

VICTOR I didn't come here to accuse you, there's no sense in that!

AMANDA Why did you come?

VICTOR To find out what you want me to do

AMANDA Divorce me, I suppose, as soon as possible I won't make any difficulties I'll go away, far away, Morocco, or Tunis, or somewhere I shall probably catch some dreadful disease, and die out there, all alone—oh dear!

VICTOR It's no use pitying yourself

AMANDA I seem to be the only one who does I might just as well enjoy it [*She sniffs*] I'm thoroughly unprincipled, Sibyl was right!

VICTOR [*irritably*] Sibyl's an ass

AMANDA [*brightening slightly*] Yes, she is rather, isn't she? I can't think why Elyot ever married her

VICTOR Do you love him?

AMANDA She seems so insipid, somehow—

VICTOR Do you love him?

AMANDA Of course she's very pretty, I suppose, in rather a shallow way, but still—

VICTOR Amanda!

AMANDA Yes, Victor?

VICTOR You haven't answered my question

AMANDA I've forgotten what it was

VICTOR [*turning away*] You're hopeless—hopeless

AMANDA Don't be angry, it's all much too serious to be angry about

VICTOR You're talking utter nonsense!

AMANDA No, I'm not, I mean it It's ridiculous for us all to stand round arguing with one another You'd much better go back to England and let your lawyers deal with the whole thing

VICTOR But what about you?

AMANDA I'll be all right

VICTOR I only want to know one thing, and you won't tell me

AMANDA What is it?

VICTOR Do you love Elyot?

AMANDA No, I hate him When I saw him again suddenly at Deauville, it was an odd sort of shock It swept me away completely He attracted me, he always has attracted me, but only the worst part of me I see that now

VICTOR I can't understand why? He's so terribly trivial and superficial

AMANDA That sort of attraction can't be explained—it's a sort of a chemical what d'you call 'em

VICTOR Yes, it must be!

AMANDA I don't expect you to understand, and I'm not going to try to excuse myself in any way Elyot was the first love affair of my life, and in spite of all the suffering he caused me before, there must have been a little spark left smouldering, which burst into flame when I came face to face with him again I completely lost grip of myself and behaved like a fool, for which I shall pay all right, you needn't worry about that But perhaps one day, when all this is dead and done with, you and I might meet and be friends That's something to hope for, anyhow Goodbye, Victor dear

[*She holds out her hand*]

VICTOR [*shaking her hand mechanically*] Do you want to marry him?

AMANDA I'd rather marry a boa constrictor

VICTOR I can't go away and leave

you with a man who drinks, and knocks you about

AMANDA You needn't worry about leaving me, as though I were a sort of parcel I can look after myself

VICTOR You said just now you were going away to Tunis, to die

AMANDA I've changed my mind, it's the wrong time of the year for Tunis I shall go somewhere quite different I believe Brioni is very nice in the summer

VICTOR Why won't you be serious for just one moment?

AMANDA I've told you, it's no use

VICTOR If it will make things any easier for you, I won't divorce you

AMANDA Victor!

VICTOR We can live apart until Sibyl has got her decree against Elyot, then, some time after that, I'll let you divorce me

AMANDA [*turning away*] I see you're determined to make me serious, whether I like it or not

VICTOR I married you because I loved you

AMANDA Stop it, Victor! Stop it! I won't listen!

VICTOR I expect I love you still, one doesn't change all in a minute You never loved me I see that now, of course, so perhaps everything has turned out for the best really

AMANDA I thought I loved you, honestly I did

VICTOR Yes, I know, that's all right

AMANDA What an escape you've had

VICTOR I've said that to myself often during the last few days

AMANDA There's no need to rub it in

VICTOR Do you agree about the divorce business?

AMANDA Yes It's very, very generous of you

VICTOR It will save you some of the mud-slinging We might persuade Sibyl not to name you

AMANDA [*ruefully*] Yes, we might

VICTOR Perhaps she'll change her mind about divorcing him

AMANDA Perhaps She certainly went into the bedroom with a predatory look in her eye

VICTOR Would you be pleased if that happened?

AMANDA Delighted

[*She laughs suddenly VICTOR looks at her, curiously SIBYL and ELYOT come out of the bedroom There is an awkward silence for a moment*]

SIBYL [*looking at AMANDA triumphantly*] Elyot and I have come to a decision

AMANDA How very nice!

VICTOR What is it?

AMANDA Don't be silly, Victor Look at their faces

ELYOT Feminine intuition, very difficult

AMANDA [*looking at SIBYL*] Feminine determination, very praiseworthy

SIBYL I am not going to divorce Elyot for a year

AMANDA I congratulate you

ELYOT [*defiantly*] Sibyl has behaved like an angel

AMANDA Well, it was certainly her big moment

[*LOUISE comes staggering in with a large tray of coffee and rolls, etc., she stands peering over the edge of it, not knowing where to put it*]

ELYOT Il faut le met sur la petite table là bas

LOUISE Oui, monsieur

[*ELYOT and VICTOR hurriedly clear the things off the side table, and LOUISE puts the tray down, and goes back into the kitchen AMANDA and SIBYL eye one another*]

AMANDA It all seems very amicable

SIBYL It is, thank you

AMANDA I don't wish to depress you, but Victor isn't going to divorce me either

ELYOT [*looking up sharply*] What!

AMANDA I believe I asked you once before this morning, never to speak to me again

ELYOT I only said "What" It was a general exclamation denoting extreme satisfaction

AMANDA [*politely to SIBYL*] Do sit down, won't you?

SIBYL I'm afraid I must be going now I'm catching the Golden Arrow, it leaves at twelve

ELYOT [*coaxingly*] You have time for a little coffee surely?

SIBYL No, I really must go!

ELYOT I shan't be seeing you again for such a long time

AMANDA [*brightly*] Living apart? How wise!

ELYOT [*ignoring her*] Please, Sibyl, do stay!

SIBYL [*looking at AMANDA with a glint in her eye*] Very well, just for a little

AMANDA Sit down, Victor, darling
[They all sit down in silence AMANDA smiles sweetly at SIBYL and holds up the coffee pot and milk jug] Half and half?

SIBYL Yes, please

AMANDA *[sociably]* What would one do without one's morning coffee? That's what I often ask myself

ELYOT Is it?

AMANDA *[withering him with a look]* Victor, sugar for Sibyl *[To SIBYL]* It would be absurd for me to call you anything but Sibyl, wouldn't it?

SIBYL *[not to be outdone]* Of course, I shall call you Mandy

[AMANDA represses a shudder]

ELYOT Oh God! We're off again
 What weather!

[AMANDA hands SIBYL her coffee]

SIBYL Thank you

VICTOR What's the time?

ELYOT If the clock's still going after last night, it's ten-fifteen

AMANDA *[handing VICTOR cup of coffee]* Here, Victor dear

VICTOR Thanks

AMANDA Sibyl, sugar for Victor

ELYOT I should like some coffee, please

[AMANDA pours some out for him, and hands it to him in silence]

AMANDA *[to VICTOR]* Brioche?

VICTOR *[jumping]* What?

AMANDA Would you like a Brioche?

VICTOR No, thank you

ELYOT I would And some butter, and some jam *[He helps himself]*

AMANDA *[to SIBYL]* Have you ever been to Brioni?

SIBYL No It's in the Adriatic, isn't it?

VICTOR The Baltic, I think

SIBYL I made sure it was in the Adriatic

AMANDA I had an aunt who went there once

ELYOT *[with his mouth full]* I once had an aunt who went to Tasmania

[AMANDA looks at him stonily He winks at her, and she looks away hurriedly]

VICTOR Funny how the South of France has become so fashionable in the summer, isn't it?

SIBYL Yes, awfully funny

ELYOT I've been laughing about it for months

AMANDA Personally, I think it's a bit too hot, although of course one can lie in the water all day

SIBYL Yes, the bathing is really divine!

VICTOR A friend of mine has a house right on the edge of Cape Ferrat

SIBYL Really?

VICTOR Yes, right on the edge

AMANDA That must be marvelous!

VICTOR Yes, he seems to like it very much!

[The conversation languishes slightly]

AMANDA *[with great vivacity]* Do you know, I really think I love traveling more than anything else in the world! It always gives me such a tremendous feeling of adventure First of all, the excitement of packing, and getting your passport visa'd and everything, then the thrill of actually starting, and trundling along on trains and ships, and then the most thrilling thing of all, arriving at strange places, and seeing strange people, and eating strange foods—

ELYOT And making strange noises afterwards

[AMANDA chokes violently VICTOR jumps up and tries to offer assistance, but she waves him away, and continues to choke]

VICTOR *[to ELYOT]* That was a damned fool thing to do

ELYOT How did I know she was going to choke?

VICTOR *[to AMANDA]* Here, drink some coffee

AMANDA *[breathlessly gasping]* Leave me alone I'll be all right in a minute

VICTOR *[to ELYOT]* You waste too much time trying to be funny

SIBYL *[up in arms]* It's no use talking to Elyot like that, it wasn't his fault

VICTOR Of course it was his fault entirely, making rotten stupid jokes—

SIBYL I thought what Elyot said was funny

VICTOR Well, all I can say is, you must have a very warped sense of humor

SIBYL That's better than having none at all

VICTOR I fail to see what humor there is in incessant trivial flippancy

SIBYL You couldn't be flippant if you tried until you were blue in the face

VICTOR I shouldn't dream of trying

SIBYL It must be very sad not to be able to see any fun in anything

[AMANDA stops choking, and looks at ELYOT He winks at her again, and she smiles]

VICTOR Fun! I should like you to tell me what fun there is in—

SIBYL I pity you, I really do I've been pitying you ever since we left Deauville

VICTOR I'm sure it's very nice of you, but quite unnecessary

SIBYL And I pity you more than ever now

VICTOR Why *now* particularly?

SIBYL If you don't see why, I'm certainly not going to tell you

VICTOR I see no reason for you to try to pick a quarrel with me I've tried my best to be pleasant to you, and comfort you

SIBYL You weren't very comforting when I lost my trunk

VICTOR I have little patience with people who go about losing luggage

SIBYL I don't go about losing luggage It's the first time I've lost anything in my life

VICTOR I find that hard to believe

SIBYL Anyhow, if you'd tipped the porter enough, everything would have been all right Small economies never pay, it's absolutely no use—

VICTOR Oh, for God's sake be quiet!

[AMANDA lifts her hand as though she were going to interfere, but ELYOT grabs her wrist They look at each other for a moment, she lets her hand rest in his]

SIBYL [rising from the table] How dare you speak to me like that!

VICTOR [also rising] Because you've been irritating me for days

SIBYL [outraged] Oh!

VICTOR [coming down to her] You're one of the most completely idiotic women I've ever met

SIBYL And you're certainly the rudest man I've ever met!

VICTOR Well then, we're quits, aren't we?

SIBYL [shrilly] One thing, you'll get your deserts all right

VICTOR What do you mean by that?

SIBYL You know perfectly well what I mean And it'll serve you right for being weak-minded enough to allow that woman to get round you so easily

VICTOR What about you? Letting that unprincipled rouse persuade you to take him back again!

[AMANDA and ELYOT are laughing silently ELYOT blows her a lingering kiss across the table]

SIBYL He's nothing of the sort! He's just been victimized, as you were victimized

VICTOR Victimized! What damned nonsense!

SIBYL [furiously] It isn't damned non-

sense! You're very fond of swearing and blustering and threatening, but when it comes to the point you're as weak as water Why, a blind cat could see what you've let yourself in for

VICTOR [equally furious] Stop making those insinuations!

SIBYL I'm not insinuating anything When I think of all the things you said about her, it makes me laugh, it does really, to see how completely she's got you again

VICTOR You can obviously speak with great authority, having had the intelligence to marry a drunkard

SIBYL So that's what she's been telling you I might have known it! I suppose she said he struck her too!

VICTOR Yes, she did, and I'm quite sure it's perfectly true

SIBYL I expect she omitted to tell you that she drank fourteen glasses of brandy last night straight off, and that the reason their first marriage was broken up was that she used to come home at all hours of the night, screaming and hiccoughing

VICTOR If he told you that, he's a filthy liar!

SIBYL He isn't—he isn't!

VICTOR And if you believe it, you're a silly scatter-brained little fool

SIBYL [screaming] How dare you speak to me like that! How dare you! I've never been so insulted in my life! How dare you!

[AMANDA and ELYOT rise quietly, and go, hand in hand, towards the front door]

VICTOR [completely giving way] It's a tremendous relief to me to have an excuse to insult you I've had to listen to your weeping and wailings for days You've clacked at me, and snivelled at me until you've nearly driven me insane, and I controlled my nerves and continued to try to help you and look after you, because I was sorry for you I always thought you were stupid from the first, but I must say I never realized that you were a malicious little vixen as well!

SIBYL [shrieking] Stop it! Stop it! You insufferable great brute!

[She slaps his face hard, and he takes her by the shoulders and shakes her like a rat, as AMANDA and ELYOT go smilingly out of the door, with their suitcases, and —]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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The Vinegar Tree, Paul Osborn

THE BREADWINNER

(1930`

BY

SOMERSET MAUGHAM

CHARACTERS

CHARLES BATTLE
MARGERY, *his wife*
JUDY, *his daughter*
PATRICK, *his son*
ALFRED GRANGER
DOROTHEA, *his wife*
DIANA, *his daughter*
TIMOTHY, *his son*

The action of the play is continuous and takes place in the drawing room of the Battles' house at Golders Green. In order to rest the audience the curtain is lowered twice during the performance.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM

NO CONTEMPORARY author has a more loyal following than William Somerset Maugham, whose good fortune it is to please both the critical and uncritical reader alike. Among college students who read he occupies the enviable place held by Kipling a generation ago. His novels, plays, short stories, and books of travel are written with honesty and quiet straight-forwardness that preclude any suggestion of his being highbrow. Maugham is a true cosmopolite: he was born in Paris in 1874, was educated in England and Germany, maintains a home in the south of France and a flat in London, and travels almost yearly to America and the Far East. After receiving a degree at Heidelberg University, he studied surgery in London at St. Thomas Hospital, he was more interested, however, in humanity than in his profession. His first play, written in German, had been produced in Berlin, and he was ambitious of becoming a successful playwright. Abandoning, like Keats, his profession of surgery for literature, within the first few years of the new century he was established as the most popular of the younger dramatists. In the meantime he was writing an occasional novel, many short stories, and essays. During the war he served as a doctor, and later as an officer in the Intelligence Division. He was taken prisoner of war, but escaped.

Maugham's best novel, *Of Human Bondage* (1915), is autobiographical, and has already taken its place beside *The Forsyte Saga* and *Old Wives' Tale* as twentieth-century classics. His best collection of short stories is *First Person Singular* (1931), his best travel book *The Gentleman in the Parlor* (1930). His best plays are *Lady Frederick* (1907), a successful imitation of Oscar Wilde, *The Land of Promise* (1914), a dramatization in part of a Canadian adventure—the author considers this his best play, *Our Betters* (1917), a full-fledged comedy of manners, slightly unpleasant, which lashes bitterly American expatriates in London society, *The Unknown* (1920), a powerful discursive play concerning the incompatibility of war and Christianity, *The Circle* (1921), a perfectly constructed and emotionally honest comedy, usually considered his best play, *The Breadwinner* (1930), *For Services Rendered* (1932), a grim, unrelieved picture of the aftermath of war, and *Sheppey* (1933), a modern morality play, sharpened by the mordant satire which is to be found in all the dramatist's later plays.

The Breadwinner illustrates excellently the dramatist's ingenious craftsmanship, his succinct dialogue, his freedom from sentimentality and the sardonic humor of his post-war plays. After many years of Ibsen, the wheel has come full circle: the protagonist takes advantage of an opportunity to shake off domestic chains and the meaningless drudgery of a prosy occupation, to escape unbearably bright children and a fatuous spouse. But in *The Breadwinner* it is not the wife seeking "self-expression," or children agonizing under parental tyranny: it is the husband and father who defaults—and with no trace of sentimental misgiving. Even taking into consideration the intricacies of current British slang, the talk of the Bright Young People is not always convincing, and one wishes that the idiotic overtures of Dorothy and Diana did not disfigure the otherwise excellent third act. *The Breadwinner* gives Maugham ample opportunity to ridicule what he considers the annoying and priggish self-assurance of modern youth—a favorite target for his satire in recent years.

In the preface to his collected plays he speaks frankly and engagingly of his profession

"I am not such a fool as to pretend that I am indifferent to the money I have made. Unlike some of my fellow-writers I had no other means of earning a living than my pen, I was not so fortunate as to marry a wife rich enough to support me [a thrust at Shaw?], nor had I the luck to have a father whose industry supplied me both with an income and with material for my satire. Without an adequate income half the possibilities of the world are cut off. I have always written with pleasure. Sometimes the result has pleased others and then my play has succeeded, sometimes my play has failed, but so far as I am concerned it has always succeeded, for my pleasure was independent of the result. The aim of the drama is not instruct but to please. Its object is delight. Art is indifferent to morals, no excellence of motive will enable you to write a good play or paint a good picture. A lofty purpose will not serve you so well as a competent technique. We no longer look upon a woman's chastity as her central virtue. I submit to my fellow dramatists that the unfaithfulness of a wife is no longer a subject for drama, but only for comedy. Stage directions are a confession of failure on the part of the author, for they are needful only when his dialogue does not meet the requirements of the drama." And in a newspaper interview he stated "Play-writing is a young man's job, it depends so largely on current feelings and habits, and at my age I really am not interested in the Bright Young People and their doings. I have lost touch with the modern movement. I must, of course, be intensely interested in the great subjects: life, death, war, and starvation. But the theater depends so much on the less important things of life." Maugham is too modest. Certainly *The Sacred Flame*, *The Man of Honor*, *For Services Rendered*, *The Unknown*, and other fine plays deal with the "great" subjects, even his comedies are concerned principally with human character, surely not one of "the less important things of life."

Somerset Maugham declared in 1933 that *Sheppey* would be his last play, and up to the present writing (1941) he has adhered to his resolution to write only fiction. At the outbreak of the war in 1939 he again served in the Intelligence Division. Stationed in Paris, he barely escaped when the Germans swept over France in June, 1940, but managed to reach England after a series of exciting adventures more melodramatic than any in his fiction.

THE BREADWINNER

ACT I

SCENE—A well-furnished drawing-room, in the modern style but without excess, an airy, sunny room looking onto the handsome suburban garden

When the curtain rises, JUDY and PATRICK are discovered PATRICK is in flannels He is a nice-looking boy of eighteen He is lying on the sofa very comfortably, reading an illustrated paper, others are scattered about him on the floor JUDY is seventeen She is pretty, blonde, and self-possessed She also is dressed in tennis things She is standing at the gramophone and has just put on a new record However bruskiy PATRICK and JUDY talk, and however frank they are in expressing their opinion, they remain engaging and delightful The same applies to their friends DIANA and TIMOTHY

Gramophone playing

PATRICK [without looking up from his paper] Aren't you sick of that yet?

JUDY My dear child, it's absolutely new It was only written last week, and the record came out yesterday morning

PATRICK Rot I was weaned on it I vividly remember Mother turning it on to get me to take the bottle quietly

JUDY Liar It's rather jolly to dance to Come on [Pulls PAT off settee]

PATRICK [without moving] Oh!

JUDY Slacker

PATRICK I wish Tim and Dinah would hurry up [Reading]

JUDY What's the time? She said they'd come immediately after lunch

PATRICK Ring them up and tell them to hurry

JUDY [amiably] Ring them up yourself [Back of settee Eating sweets]

PATRICK Lazy bound

JUDY Tim's going back next term after all He wanted to go up to Cambridge with you, but Alfred said he must stay at school another year [Dancing]

PATRICK He's only seventeen

JUDY He'll be eighteen in December

[Winds gramophone]

PATRICK There's all the difference between being eighteen now and eighteen in December I should have thought that was obvious to the meanest intelligence

JUDY [up stage to window] Here they are [She goes to the door and opens it] Dinah! [Lifts gramophone lid]

DIANA [outside] Hulloo!

JUDY We're in here Bring your rackets along

DIANA Right-ho [Gramophone is turned off Heard off stage] Don't talk rot, Tim

TIMOTHY I'm not I tell you Tilden played exactly the same stroke over and over again

DIANA And if Tilden does it you can, of course!

TIMOTHY Why not! He's not the only one

DIANA Your other name's Borotra, isn't it?

TIMOTHY That isn't funny

DIANA No, but your tennis is

TIMOTHY Silly ass!

[DIANA comes in, a dark, pretty girl of eighteen and a bit, with fine eyes and a fresh color She has a racket in her hand She is followed by her brother TIMOTHY He is a year younger than she, and, as we have heard, will not be eighteen till December He is a slim, tall, dark youth wearing a gay blazer and a muffler, and he carries two rackets PATRICK gets up from the sofa]

PATRICK Hulloo, Dinah

DIANA Hulloo!

PATRICK I forget, do we kiss?

DIANA Only at dances under the influence of claret cup

[Throws racket on window seat]

PATRICK Hulloo, Tim How are you?

TIMOTHY All right How are you?

PATRICK [pointing to the two rackets] I say, what's the idea?

TIMOTHY I've come on in my game a bit lately One must have two rackets, you know

PATRICK Wimbledon Eh, what?

DIANA Tim is now a blood

PATRICK I hear you're going back next term

TIMOTHY Rotten, isn't it? Alfred's being frightfully tiresome

PATRICK How is your respected parent?

TIMOTHY Very facetious

DIANA Few people know how exhausting it is to have a humorist in the family

PATRICK I'm thankful to say that's not one of our troubles You'd have to get an ax to get Father to see that you're making a joke

JUDY Poor Daddy, no one could say that he has a sense of humor

TIMOTHY Have you pled him with liquor?

PATRICK It has no effect, it's constitutional

DIANA When did you get back, Pat?

PATRICK Just before lunch

TIMOTHY We broke up the day before yesterday

DIANA Are you glad to have left school?

PATRICK Rather! I didn't have a bad time, you know But I want to go up to Cambridge now I think it'll be rather fun

JUDY I think he's grown since Easter, don't you, Dinah?

PATRICK I'm sure I have I can tell by my dinner jacket I'm going to order some new tails to-morrow

TIMOTHY Who are you going to?

PATRICK Well, I don't know I suppose Daddy'll want me to go to his tailor, as usual

TIMOTHY Oh, Lord!

PATRICK But I'm going to tell him that of course he's all right for him, but honestly he's not smart enough for me

TIMOTHY Quite!

DIANA [*shakes her shingled head*] Lend me your comb, Tim

TIMOTHY [*looking in his pocket*] Oh, damn! I left it at home

JUDY Pat'll lend you his

PATRICK [*taking a comb out of his pocket*] Here you are

[*He gives it to her and taking a little glass from her bag she combs her hair Then JUDY takes the comb from her and runs it through her hair*]

TIMOTHY Are you still going in for the Bar, Pat?

PATRICK Oh, yes I think so After all, it's the only profession that really gives you a chance It'll be rather fun coming

up to town to eat my dinners Of course, I shall go in for politics

DIANA Which side?

PATRICK Well, I haven't really made up my mind yet Daddy's always been a Liberal, but there's nothing to be got out of being a Liberal now I think the only thing now is Labour

[*TIMOTHY goes over to JUDY Takes comb and combs his perfectly ordered hair Returns it to PATRICK, who mechanically does the same and then puts it back in his pocket JUDY sits on window seat*]

DIANA I'm Labour I always have been

PATRICK They want people like us, public school and 'varsity and that sort of thing

TIMOTHY [*combing hair*] Of course, you're lucky, you can go in for anything you like I've got to go into Alfred's rotten old business

DIANA You can't blame Alfred It's an old-fashioned firm, and he wants his only son to follow in his footsteps

TIMOTHY Can you see me as a respectable family lawyer?

PATRICK Perfectly, and I can see you giving me nice fat briefs

TIMOTHY [*gives PATRICK comb*] I'll tell you one thing, I'm not going to live at home

PATRICK They couldn't expect you to do that I don't mind coming here during the vac for a bit when I haven't got anywhere better to go, but as soon as I settle down in London I'm going to tell Daddy that I must have a flat

TIMOTHY I say, we might share one [*Sits up*]

PATRICK That's not a bad idea I've got rather a fancy for Albemarle Street personally [*Lighting cigarette*]

TIMOTHY That would do me all right As long as it's absolutely central, I don't care where I live

[*Lies down on seat*]

PATRICK It's a damned good address And one must have that

TIMOTHY Absolutely

DIANA I'm simply fed up with the suburbs

PATRICK So am I Fed to the teeth

JUDY I can't imagine why they want to live out in the wilds like this

PATRICK Poor Mummy thinks this is such a nice neighborhood

JUDY It was all very well when we were children We had to have fresh air

and all that sort of rot But now we're grown up I can't see the point of it

DIANA Would you believe it, Dorothy thinks it's central! When I tell her it's the back of beyond, she says, "My dear, what are you talking about? It's only twelve minutes by tube from Piccadilly Circus"

[ALL laugh]

PATRICK One's people are really extraordinary You know, ours haven't begun to realize that we are grown up

JUDY Do you know [reading], Mummy still wants to buy my clothes for me

DIANA No!

JUDY I had to make the devil of a row before I could get my own dress allowance

TIMOTHY I will say that for Alfred, he's given us an allowance ever since we were fifteen

PATRICK I'm expecting to have a bit of a dust-up with Father over my allowance at Cambridge I'm going to ask for five hundred

TIMOTHY Do you think he'll give you that?

PATRICK No, but I think he'll give me four If I ask for four he'll try to get off for three-fifty

TIMOTHY He oughtn't to lick at that

[Lies down on stool]

PATRICK He oughtn't to lick at anything After all, I didn't ask to be brought into the world He did it entirely for his own amusement, and he's had a lot of fun out of me and he must be prepared to pay for it

TIMOTHY That's fair enough Hey!

[Business with racket]

PATRICK When I settle down in London he'll have to give me at least five hundred a year Everybody knows that you can't earn a living at the Bar till you're thirty

TIMOTHY If Alfred gave me the same we ought to be able to do ourselves pretty well in a flat

[Puts racket in cover]

DIANA It makes me perfectly sick when I hear you two talk of having a flat in town I'd love to have one of my own Wouldn't you, Judy?

JUDY Simply love it

DIANA I'm sick of living at home

PATRICK Why don't you marry?

DIANA Oh, I'm not going to marry for years yet I want to marry when I'm twenty-four I want to have a good time first

JUDY Oh, I think that's rather old I want to marry when I'm twenty-one

PATRICK Tell Alfred that you want your own flat

DIANA Can you see his face? [Imitating her father] I've made a jolly good home for my kiddie-widdies, old boy, and between you and me, I don't mind telling you they think there's no place like it H'm! H'm!

[ALL laugh]

PATRICK [with smile] Poor Alfred

DIANA Alfred's all right He means well

TIMOTHY Only he's so terribly hearty

DIANA I think it's rather pathetic sometimes, his delusion that one's really going to look upon one's parents as friends

TIMOTHY It's so shy-making, his one-boy-to-another stunt

DIANA Well, you know, it's got its advantages Call him "old bean" and you can get anything you want out of him

PATRICK It's so damned humiliating having to play up to one's people all the time

DIANA What else can you do? They have an idea about you in their heads and you have to live up to it They're simply incapable of understanding that you're not in the least what they think you are

[ALL laugh]

PATRICK How is our respected parent these days, Judy?

JUDY Oh, I don't know, same as usual

DIANA Of course you haven't seen him yet?

PATRICK No I suppose he'll be getting back from the city presently I was only asking because I've been wondering if there was any chance of getting a car out of him

TIMOTHY I say, that would be marvellous

PATRICK Well, now I've left school I ought to have a car of my own It's absurd that I should have to go about in the family bus [To JUDY] Have you said anything to Mummy about it?

JUDY She says it all depends on how things are on the Stock Exchange

PATRICK Oh, gosh! They're all rolling on the Stock Exchange As long as the world is full of mugs stockbrokers are bound to make money

DIANA You know I like your father, Pat

JUDY Very dull, poor darling

DIANA I'm not sure that I wouldn't

rather have a dull father than a funny one

PATRICK Fortunately we don't see much of him except at dinner And that's pretty ghastly, isn't it, Judy?

JUDY Ghastly isn't the word

PATRICK Daddy sitting at one end of the table never opening his mouth, and Mother improving our minds with bright chat about art and literature

DIANA That's home life

PATRICK Well, I've had about enough of it, I can tell you *[Pause]* D'you think that when *we're* their age we shall be as boring as they are?

JUDY Oh, I don't see why we should for a moment

TIMOTHY How old is your father, Pat?

PATRICK I think he's forty-two, isn't he, Judy?

JUDY Yes, he was comparatively young when he married Mummy Twenty-three

DIANA One of those awful war marriages, I suppose Like Alfred and Dorothy

JUDY Oh, no They must have been married before that Pat's eighteen

DIANA Well, when was the war?

[Looks at paper]

TIMOTHY Oh, don't let's talk of that old war I'm fed to the teeth with it

JUDY What a bore the people are who went through it

PATRICK Crashing

JUDY When they get together and start talking about their experiences I could scream

DIANA I *know* As if *any one* cared

TIMOTHY They were a dreary lot, that war generation

DIANA Well, don't forget that except for the war there would have been a lot more of them

TIMOTHY They don't amount to anything any more They're finished and done with, thank God

DIANA Unfortunately some of them don't know it

JUDY Well, I'm going to make it my business to tell them whenever I have an opportunity

PATRICK After all, let's face it, people aren't any good after forty, are they? They're only in the way, and life can't be any pleasure to them

DIANA I don't suppose it is much, but what are you to do with them? You can't drown them like puppies

TIMOTHY It's obvious that people live much too long now

PATRICK If nature were properly organized they'd just drop off quietly at the age of forty

DIANA D'you think they'd like it?

PATRICK I don't see why they should mind They've had their day They've done everything they're capable of doing Look at all the poets and painters and so on What on earth have they done that was worth while after they were forty? What's the good of hanging on, a burden to yourself and every one connected with you? It would be much better if they just passed out quietly, like the mayflies, when they'd had their little bit of nonsense

JUDY Of course, I don't expect to live till I'm forty Fancy being thirty-six! I shall die when I'm twenty-nine

[Rises and goes to oak chest on stairs, gets tennis shoes and comes down, sitting on seat down stage]

DIANA Have you made your will?

JUDY No, but I've been thinking about it

TIMOTHY You might leave me those *jade buttons* of yours They'd make marvelous links

JUDY Oh, I'm going to be buried with all my jewelry I made up my mind about that years ago

PATRICK Don't talk rot I'm being serious In a well-regulated state at a certain age every one should be put painlessly out of existence

DIANA Without exception?

PATRICK Of course

DIANA It would be rather a wrench when it comes to one's own people

PATRICK Of course it would be a wrench But one would have to sacrifice one's private feelings to the common good Take our case, for instance Judy and I are quite fond of Father and Mother Aren't we, Judy?

JUDY Yes We're as fond of them as any one can be of their people

PATRICK But we're not blind to their defects Mummy is terribly arty and high-brow And poor Daddy has absolutely no sense of humor

JUDY Absolutely

PATRICK They've always been very nice to us And we've always been very decent to them I think we've been rather a credit to them

DIANA On the whole

PATRICK But now it's quite obvious that their use is ended They can only

hamper us in the future We're grown up, and we want our freedom

TIMOTHY You're absolutely right, Patrick

PATRICK Of course I'm right I'm not just talking through my hat I've thought about this a great deal We've arrived at an age now when we ought to be on our own We've got the whole world before us We can't afford to be What's the word I want?

DIANA Footled about

JUDY Tied

PATRICK Trammeled, that's it Trammeled by domestic ties

TIMOTHY It is damned unfair, there's no doubt about that

PATRICK Unfair isn't the word It's damned unjust That's what it is They've had their fling, and now they want to prevent us from having ours After all, one must have money And one wants it when one's young What's the good of money to middle-aged people?

DIANA They do spend it in the most idiotic way One can't deny that

PATRICK Daddy's been on the Stock Exchange for a good many years, and he must have made a packet It does seem a bit thick that Judy and I should have to wait for it till we're too old to spend it

DIANA Of course, all that's true But it does seem rather drastic to kill the poor old things off

JUDY I don't believe you'd have the heart to do it, Pat!

PATRICK I daresay when it came to the point I should hesitate One has one's feelings After all, it's a rotten thing having to put an old dog out of its sufferings I don't want to be cruel I merely said that in a well-regulated state, when people have outlived their utility, say at forty, they ought to be put out of their misery But we don't live in a well-regulated state, and I don't suppose we ever shall

TIMOTHY I don't know about that Our generation hasn't had a chance yet

PATRICK Personally, I'd be quite willing to compromise

DIANA How d'you mean?

PATRICK Well, at forty I'd make people retire and hand over all their property to their children If they hadn't any property the state would support them, and of course, if they had, their children would make them an allowance

TIMOTHY That's not a bad idea

PATRICK Judy and I would give our people two hundred and fifty a year That

would be quite enough They could have a little cottage in the country Mother could keep chickens, and Daddy could potter about the garden I think they'd be awfully happy

JUDY Mummy's always said that's just the sort of thing she'd love

DIANA Do you think two hundred and fifty would be enough?

PATRICK Oh, quite You see, they'd grow their own vegetables, and then there'd be the eggs

DIANA I say, what a lark we could have

JUDY [looks out window] Here's Mummy!

[JUDY and PAT rush to window DIANA and TIM get rackets from window seat]

PATRICK Oh, let's go and play tennis then

TIMOTHY Come on

[Takes racket off table]

JUDY How are we going to play?

[As they get up, TIMOTHY taking his rackets, MARGERY and DOROTHY come in from garden MARGERY is a pretty, slightly faded blonde, and DOROTHY is dark, like her daughter, and rather alluring They are both under forty, smartly dressed, and a good deal made up Neither is the decrepit old creature you might have suspected from listening to their children's conversation, and neither has the slightest idea that her day is over]

MARGERY You lazy people, why aren't you playing tennis?

JUDY We're just going to, Mummy

PATRICK Hulloa, Aunt Dorothy

[JUDY on stairs TIM at armchair R Ties shoe-lace]

DOROTHY You've grown, Pat

MARGERY Isn't he enormous?

[DOROTHY kisses PATRICK on the cheek]

DOROTHY [archly] I'm not quite sure if Alfred would approve of my kissing such a grown-up young man

PATRICK After all, you are my aunt

DOROTHY Not really, of course Your mother and I are only first cousins

DIANA She means that except for Alfred you could marry

DOROTHY Don't be so silly, Dinah

TIMOTHY It's not a bad idea If Alfred's run over by a motor-bus you shall marry Dorothy, Pat I think you'd make me a very good father

PATRICK I wouldn't let you call me

by my Christian name I should insist on you calling me Papa

MARGERY Run along, you idiots Dorothy and I want to talk

TIMOTHY Come on, you kids

[Off first, followed by DIANA and PAT]

PATRICK [going out] No rest for the weary

[The four young things go MARGERY and DOROTHY settle themselves down for a gossip by getting their lipsticks and mirrors out of their bags and starting to paint their lips]

DOROTHY What a nice-looking boy Pat is growing You'll have to keep an eye on him, darling You know what women are [Sits L of settee]

MARGERY Oh, I'm not frightened He's absolutely innocent And he tells me everything [Busy at table]

DOROTHY They talk a lot of nonsense about the young nowadays I don't believe they know half as much as we did at their age

MARGERY I wish they wouldn't grow up quite so quickly When Pat came back from school this morning it gave me quite a shock

DOROTHY I don't care It's not like before the war People don't grow old like they used to When Dinah and I go out together we're always taken for sisters

MARGERY I honestly don't think you look a day older than she does But then you're dark That gives you such an advantage When you're blonde like me you fade

DOROTHY You haven't Why, I was only thinking at dinner last night how lovely your hair looked

MARGERY It's several shades darker than when I was a girl I was wondering if any one would notice if I had it touched up a little

DOROTHY Of course, it does make the face look harder

MARGERY Oh, I wouldn't have it dyed I'd only just have a few *reflets d'or* put in Ernest said he could do it so that not a soul would know it wasn't natural

DOROTHY Well, I know some one who likes you very much as you are

MARGERY Dorothy! As a matter of fact, I don't know what you're talking about

DOROTHY Come off it, Marge Do you think I haven't got eyes in my head? Why, it was obvious last night

MARGERY You don't think it was, really?

DOROTHY Well, it was obvious to me I've been dying to know what he said to you

MARGERY [looks off windows and sits R of settee] I suppose those children really are playing tennis?

DOROTHY Oh, yes I'm simply thrilled, Marge

MARGERY Well, he said he'd been wanting to tell me for a long time, but knowing Charlie on the Stock Exchange and all that sort of thing he hadn't liked to But he simply couldn't help himself

DOROTHY During dinner, was that, or afterwards?

MARGERY Well, he began during dinner, but not seriously you know—lightly, he didn't really get serious till afterwards when we'd been dancing

DOROTHY Does he dance well?

MARGERY Divinely

DOROTHY He wanted to see how you'd take it Men are rather cautious I suppose they don't want to get snubbed Tell me what you said to him

MARGERY Well, of course, I laughed I said "Do you realize that I have two children who are practically grown up?" He said he didn't believe it He said he'd bet a monkey that I wasn't a day more than twenty-five What is a monkey, darling?

DOROTHY A thousand pounds and a pony's five hundred I can't think why men don't say five hundred pounds when they mean five hundred pounds

MARGERY It does seem silly, doesn't it?

DOROTHY Go on, dear

MARGERY Then I said, "I've got a girl of seventeen" I didn't say anything about Pat I thought if he liked to think he was younger he could

DOROTHY I don't blame you

MARGERY Then he said, "Well, all I can say is you must have been married out of your cradle" So then I gave him a look and I said, "Well, I wasn't very old, I admit"

DOROTHY I know exactly how you said it Sweeping the floor with your eyelashes I've seen you do it dozens of times, and it always gets them

MARGERY It's quite unconscious I never mean to Then he took my hand and said, "I wonder if you know how much more attractive it is to be a grown woman than a silly slip of a girl"

DOROTHY Men always say that And

I'm sure it's true Men don't fall in love with girls They're not interesting enough

MARGERY I suppose there's something in that

DOROTHY And what happened next?

MARGERY He asked me what Charlie does on Sundays "Oh," I said, "he goes and plays golf" "Good old Charlie," he said Then he asked me if I wouldn't go motoring with him in the country

DOROTHY And are you going?

MARGERY Of course not Why, I hardly know the man

DOROTHY You can't expect to get to know the man if you never see him

MARGERY It wouldn't be fair to the children

DOROTHY Charlie goes and has a good time playing golf I don't see why you shouldn't go motoring if you want to

MARGERY You know what I am, Dorothy

DOROTHY I don't believe you're as cold as you pretend

MARGERY Perhaps not But Charlie's never looked at another woman since he married me I shouldn't like to do anything to hurt his feelings

DOROTHY It wouldn't hurt his feelings if *he didn't know* I don't say go too far, but a flirtation can do no one any harm And every one knows there's nothing like having a man pay her a little attention to make a woman look young

MARGERY Of course, there's something in that [*Rises, takes cigarette*]

DOROTHY You know as well as I do that in all the time we've been married I've never been unfaithful to Alfred But I've had scores of beaux That's what's kept me fresh and alert and up-to-date

MARGERY It's true that one wants something to make up for married life

DOROTHY No one could want a better husband than Alfred, and I'm sure he's always been absolutely faithful to me, but I could never have stood his heartiness for all these years if I hadn't had my little flirtations on the side

MARGERY What a mercy it is that men have to go to business every day What would one do if they were about the house all day long! [*Lights cigarette*]

DOROTHY How has Charlie been lately?

MARGERY Well, you've seen him Just the same as ever He never changes

DOROTHY Of course, I've seen for ages that he rather bores you

MARGERY Nineteen years is a long time to be married

DOROTHY Too long, if you ask me

MARGERY I suppose I've got nothing to complain of, really He gives me everything I want

DOROTHY And you never quarrel, do you?

MARGERY Oh, never And he never fusses But of course he is limited

DOROTHY *Men are!* I've noticed that often

MARGERY He isn't interested in art and literature like I am When I have intellectual people up at the house he always seems rather out of it

DOROTHY Yes, I've noticed that too Of course, he's awfully nice, but he's not exactly what you'd call brilliant, is he?

MARGERY No, I'm afraid he isn't, poor darling I suppose one can't have everything, and he's just as much in love with me to-day as the day we were married It's rather beastly of me to find fault with him

DOROTHY That's not finding fault One can't be married to a man all those years without knowing what he is and what he isn't

MARGERY I shudder to think what would happen if he ever suspected that for years now I haven't cared for him, I mean really cared

DOROTHY That's one advantage we have men don't see things

MARGERY Of course, I like him, you know, and I wouldn't do anything to wound him But I am an intelligent woman, and I can't help seeing he's a bit of a bore

DOROTHY If you don't mind my saying so, darling, the fact is, he has no sense of humor

MARGERY I know It's tragic I'm going to say something dreadful to you, Dorothy Have you ever asked yourself what you'd do if you were a widow?

DOROTHY What woman hasn't?

MARGERY Of course, I'd be dreadfully upset if anything happened to poor Charlie I'd simply cry my eyes out, and at first I'd miss him dreadfully

DOROTHY That's only natural I don't know any one who's got so much heart as you have

MARGERY But when once I'd got over the shock I believe I'd be very happy, you know

DOROTHY I'm sure you would With your fair hair you'd look too lovely in mourning

MARGERY I'd never marry again I

think every woman should marry, but once is enough

DOROTHY Oh, I like having a man about the house I think I'd be dreadfully lost without one

MARGERY Well, I have so many resources in myself It would be lovely to be able to do exactly as you liked without consulting anybody And having your own friends And being free to run over to Paris or down to the Riviera without thinking, of course Charlie can't get away and the poor old thing'll be so lost without me And then there's one's own self-development You can't really develop your personality properly when you're married

DOROTHY Speaking of the Riviera, have you said anything to Charlie about the summer?

MARGERY It's rather difficult Charlie wants to go on the river like we always do, so that he can go up to the city when he wants to

DOROTHY Why shouldn't Alfred and Charlie go by themselves? It's so silly of husbands and wives always to take their holidays together It's no change for either of them

MARGERY The Riviera would be lovely for the children

DOROTHY They wouldn't interfere with us at all They'd be bathing and boating all the time, and they're too young to go into the baccarat rooms My dear, we'd have the time of our lives

MARGERY It sounds too divine

DOROTHY I saw some lovely pajamas in Bond Street the other day You know they wear pajamas all day long in summer

MARGERY I know I suppose it would be frightfully expensive

DOROTHY What is the use of money if you don't spend it? And you can always tell Charlie it would be such an education for the children

[PATRICK appears, followed immediately by the others]

PATRICK I say, Mummy it is disgraceful, the court wasn't marked out

MARGERY Oh, I am sorry

PATRICK I've given the gardener hell He had the damned cheek to say he hadn't had any orders

MARGERY How stupid of him I know I meant to tell him

PATRICK The moment my back is turned everything goes wrong in this house

MARGERY Is he doing it now?

[JUDY enters]

PATRICK Yes, but it won't be ready for a quarter of an hour I don't know why Judy couldn't see about it What's she there for?

JUDY You seem to think I have nothing to do I was fearfully busy this morning, and I forgot

[Going up to chest on stairs—changes shoes]

PATRICK Well, you shouldn't forget

MARGERY Don't be disagreeable the moment you get back, darling There's lots of time

PATRICK I don't know why we can't have a hard court It's absurd to ask people to play on grass now

TIMOTHY I've told Alfred that we absolutely must have one at our place I mean, you can't expect to improve your game if you have to play on grass all the time

PATRICK You might talk to Father, Mummy After all, if he wants us to live at home, the least he can do is to provide us with the ordinary necessities of existence

MARGERY It would be an awful expense

TIMOTHY You can get a very decent hard court for about four hundred pounds

PATRICK That's nothing Daddy couldn't jib at that He hasn't got anything to do with his money except spend it on us

MARGERY That's true

[A ring at the door is heard]

JUDY Hulloo, who's that? Oh, God, I hope it's not callers!

MARGERY I said I wasn't at home to anybody to-day

PATRICK Fancy living in a place where people pay calls This is the back of beyond all right

MARGERY Don't be so silly, Pat There are a lot of very intelligent people who live here, and it's a treat when they drop in for a chat over a cup of tea

ALFRED [off stage] Is Mrs Battle at home?

[The front door is opened, and a voice is heard asking for MRS BATTLE]

DOROTHY Why, it's Alfred

MARGERY [calls] Alfred!

ALFRED [outside] Hulloo, hulloo, hulloo!

MARGERY Come in, Dorothy's here [ALFRED breezes in He is a tall, well-set-up, middle-aged man, with a red

face and a hearty, blustering, jovial manner He laughs a great deal at everything he says]

ALFRED [*taking MARGERY'S hand*]
Hulloa, popsy-wopsy [*Seeing PATRICK*] And look who's here When did you breeze in, old bean?

[*Goes over to PATRICK, pulls him up*]

PATRICK I got back just before lunch

ALFRED Trust you for that And I bet you wallope.] into the fatted calf

[*Slaps PATRICK on the back*]

PATRICK [*with hauteur*] I managed to swallow a morsel of cold chicken

ALFRED And how does it feel to have left school for good, eh, young-feller-melad?

PATRICK Oh, all right

ALFRED Best days of your life, you know, old boy And when they're gone, they're gone Can't put the clock back if you try till doomsday That's the way of the world Well, it's not a bad old place if you have a front seat and take care that no one diddles you out of it

TIMOTHY You do talk most footling rot, Alfred

DOROTHY Tim, you mustn't be so rude to your father

ALFRED Let the little blighter say what he likes Respect be damned Tim and I are a couple of pals, aren't we, old boy?

TIMOTHY [*link arms, go down a step into scene*] Rather I say, old cock, what about that hard court? You said you'd think about it

ALFRED It's a devil of a lot of money

TIMOTHY It's not as if you couldn't afford it Come on, old bean, be a sport

ALFRED [*beaming*] Well, if you put it like that I suppose I must say all right

[*ALL laugh*]

TIMOTHY Good

ALFRED [*over to JUDY*] And how are you, Judy old gal? Bit on the quiet side to-day, aren't you?

JUDY I don't think so

ALFRED Love?

JUDY No

ALFRED When are you going to get married?

JUDY I'm not thinking of getting married

ALFRED And why not, if you please?

JUDY Well, for one reason nobody's asked me

ALFRED What! Why, my little early-

gurle has three proposals a week Don't you, Dinah?

DIANA No, Alfred, I don't

ALFRED Don't you believe her I know And when I say I know, I know Paterfamias [*Laughs*] But we can't have little [*pats her face*] Judy-pudy neglected [*To TIMOTHY*] Come along, young pie-face, you propose to her, and then she can say she's turned down a blood

TIMOTHY I'm not going to take a chance like that, Alfred She'll accept me

JUDY Owl

DOROTHY Why have you left your office so early, Alfred?

ALFRED A sudden desire to see my old—old dutch

DOROTHY Don't be funny, Alfred

ALFRED I can't help it, my dear I've tried, but it's no good It's my nature [*Slapping DOROTHY on back*] But, joking apart, as a matter of fact, I came along to see Charlie

MARGERY He's not here He's in the city

ALFRED No, he isn't At least, I can't get hold of him He hasn't been at his office all day

MARGERY That's funny

ALFRED No, it isn't To tell you the truth, I'm just a teeny-weeny bit anxious

MARGERY [*surprised*] Why?

ALFRED Hasn't he told you anything?

MARGERY No, what? Has something happened?

ALFRED I suppose he thought if it came out all right there was no use bothering you, and if it didn't, you'd know quite soon enough

MARGERY But what is it?

ALFRED Perhaps I oughtn't to have said anything about it

PATRICK Father hasn't gone bust, Uncle Alfred?

ALFRED I think you kiddie-widdies had better go out into the garden Dorothy, you stay

PATRICK If anything's the matter you may just as well tell us too Mummy will anyway, the moment you've gone

DIANA Come along, Tim We'll go Shout when you're through

[*DIANA and TIMOTHY go out into the garden*]

MARGERY This isn't another of your jokes, Alfred?

ALFRED I wish it were No, this is serious Did you happen to notice that a

fellow called Tommy Avon shot himself last Friday?

MARGERY Yes Dreadful, wasn't it? We knew him We went to Ascot with him last year

PATRICK Who was Tommy Avon?

ALFRED He was very well known in the city He was one of your father's clients Good fellow and all that One of the best But I'm afraid he's let your governor down badly

MARGERY But I always thought Charles had such a high-class business He never went in for anything speculative

ALFRED That's why it's such tough luck on him I flatter myself I'm about as shrewd as they make 'em, and I wouldn't have hesitated to trust Tommy Avon with a million if I'd had it

JUDY But what's actually *happened*?

ALFRED You wouldn't understand if I told you But the long and short of it is that it's *settling-day* to-day, and if your father hasn't been able to get his pals to come to the rescue he'll be *hammered*

JUDY What does that mean?

ALFRED Run

MARGERY [*with a cry of dismay*] Oh! What *shall* we do?

DOROTHY Don't give way, Marge It's not certain yet

ALFRED Luckily for him he's got some very good friends Of course, his whole private fortune will have to go in But if he's able to raise a substantial sum outside, he can weather the storm

PATRICK Shall we have to leave this house and give up the car?

ALFRED I don't know about that If he pulls through, I daresay it won't make much difference to his income He's got a very sound business and a very good reputation

PATRICK Oh, then things aren't so bad as all that

ALFRED Except that all his *savings* are gone down the drain

MARGERY Then if anything happened to him we'd be penniless?

PATRICK He's as strong as a horse, Mummy I was only telling Judy just now that I thought he'd probably live to a hundred He'll make another fortune all right

MARGERY But what does it depend on, his pulling through?

ALFRED Well, to put it shortly it depends on whether Arthur Letter was willing to back him or not

PATRICK Who's Arthur Letter?

ALFRED He's the chairman of your

father's bank He was to give your father his decision last night

MARGERY Oh, that's why he only got in just in time to dress for dinner We were dining at the Savoy

ALFRED How did he seem?

MARGERY Just about as usual

ALFRED He can't have been quite the same as usual At that moment it had just been decided whether he would have to file his petition in bankruptcy or could start with more or less of a clean slate

MARGERY I didn't notice anything I was afraid we'd be late for dinner

ALFRED How about this morning?

MARGERY I had breakfast in my room Judy and he had breakfast together

ALFRED Did he seem up or down?
[*To JUDY*]

JUDY To tell you the truth, I didn't pay any attention I always read the *Mirror* at breakfast

ALFRED That's a wash-out, then He had an appointment with me at ten, but he never kept it It was damned important too That's what puzzles me

JUDY He left here about half-past nine

MARGERY Do you mean to say he hasn't been at his office all day?

ALFRED No

PATRICK [*with a gasp*] I say

[*Rises They all look at PAT The thought occurs to them simultaneously that CHARLES may have killed himself*]

MARGERY [*with agitation*] Oh, no, no, it's impossible He couldn't do anything so cruel to me

JUDY I wonder if he was rather strange this morning Oh, Uncle Alfred, it would be too awful if while we were eating kedgeriee he was—[*rises*—he was making up his mind to

MARGERY Judy, Judy! No No He couldn't do anything so cowardly

PATRICK D'you think it's possible, Uncle Alfred? I say it would be moldy

ALFRED Well, old boy, I don't mind telling you that *was* in my mind when I got here I tried to be hearty like I always am, but between you and me the gatepost it was a bit of an effort I daresay you noticed it Charlie's the most punctilious fellow I've never known him cut a date in my life

MARGERY [*becoming a trifle hysterical*] No, no, no, no! I'm so frightened

DOROTHY Darling, don't [*Goes to settle to MARGERY*] After all there's

no reason why you should believe the worst at once

MARGERY But why wasn't he at his office? On this day, when it was so essential

ALFRED If anything was to be saved from the wreck at all

DOROTHY Perhaps he was knocked down by a taxi and is lying unconscious in some hospital

MARGERY That wouldn't be much consolation either

PATRICK But can't we do something?

JUDY I think we ought to drag the Thames

PATRICK You fool, one can't drag the Thames

JUDY Well, we can drag the ponds on the heath

[ALFRED goes up to C window and back]

MARGERY Oh, don't, don't He's so proud He's so sensitive I've got an awful fear that sooner than face us and tell us he's ruined he's

DOROTHY Don't say it, Marge It's so unlucky

PATRICK Oughtn't we go to the police?

ALFRED Not yet We should look such fools if he suddenly turned up

DOROTHY I'm all for telephoning round to the hospitals

MARGERY We must do something I shall go mad

ALFRED If he doesn't turn up tonight, of course, we'll get in touch with the police stations

PATRICK Couldn't we send out an S O S on the wireless? It's what people generally do when some one disappears

JUDY That wouldn't do much good if he's lying at the bottom of Whitestone Pond

MARGERY What a stigma on the children

DOROTHY Oh, darling, don't make things out worse than they are Alfred could always get the jury to bring in a verdict of temporarily insane

PATRICK Of course, it may be that he's only lost his memory and he'll turn up somewhere in a few days

JUDY Bournemouth That's where they're generally found

[ALL look at JUDY]

DOROTHY But, Alfred, why can't you ring up that man who was going to back him? Then we shall know if Charles had any reason to do anything desperate or not

[PAT goes L]

ALFRED Arthur Letter? It's not so easy as all that to get hold of the chairman of a great London bank I don't suppose he'd tell me anything if I did

DOROTHY Well, you can try

MARGERY Please, Alfred I'm so terribly anxious

ALFRED All right I'll see if he'll speak to me He can't eat me

[Exits off stairs L Pause]

MARGERY The suspense is too awful

[PAT takes a chocolate, goes up, and comes back]

PATRICK Did Father go out in his top hat this morning?

MARGERY Oh, Pat, don't be so silly This isn't the moment to think of top-hats

PATRICK I don't agree with you I particularly want to know

JUDY I think so I should have noticed it if he hadn't

PATRICK Then he can't have been meditating suicide when he left this house

MARGERY Why not?

PATRICK Mummy darling, no man in his senses would commit suicide in a top hat

JUDY But if he was temporarily insane he wasn't in his senses

PATRICK Don't be idiotic, Judy What can you know about men? A chap who was going to commit suicide would naturally put on a cap or, at the outside, a bowler

MARGERY Oh, no, Pat, your father was always so particular He would never have gone out in a tail-coat and a cap, whatever he was going to do Never

PATRICK That's what I say, if he went out in a top hat he hasn't committed suicide

JUDY [rises and faces PAT] I don't see why not Supposing he jumped in the river he could always leave it on the tow-path

PATRICK And have people come along and say, "Hulloa, what's a brand-new top hat doing on the towpath?"

[Goes up and down]

DOROTHY What is Alfred doing?

MARGERY Isn't it awful to think that only a few minutes ago we were all so happy We were talking of going down to the Riviera for the summer We hadn't a care in the world And now this terrible thing has happened

JUDY Life is like that

PATRICK Oh, Lord, you are a gloom,

JUDY If you haven't got anything cheerful to say, for heaven's sake shut up!

JUDY I don't see any object in not facing facts I'm psychic I'm absolutely convinced that Daddy's lying at the bottom of Whitestone Pond

[ALFRED comes in]

ALFRED Well, boys and girls Good news

MARGERY Alfred!

[Rises All rise except JUDY]

ALL Cheers! How nice! [Etc]

ALFRED I just mentioned my name, and they put me through to Sir Arthur at once I didn't give anything away Trust your Uncle Alfred for that He told me he'd seen Charlie last night at his private house, and in consideration of Charlie's personal character he'd agreed to let him have enough money to meet all his obligations

MARGERY Oh, my dear, how awfully nice of him [ALL very pleased]

ALL Cheers! How nice! [Etc]

ALFRED [to PAT] When old Charlie-parlie left Sir Arthur's sumptuous mansion he had a whacking fat check in his pocket

MARGERY What a relief!

[Sits takes DOROTHY'S hand]

DOROTHY But why hasn't he been at his office to-day?

ALFRED Oh, that's a minor point I suppose he's been tearing round and hadn't any time He'll tell us that when we see him The great thing is that he's weathered the storm

PATRICK Then we're not ruined after all!

[Brighly]

ALFRED [to PAT] No Your father's taken a toss, but he's in the saddle again and there's no reason why in a few years he shouldn't be where he was [To all] Of course he'll have to work like a beaver

JUDY Daddy loves work That's one thing

ALFRED He'll have to keep his nosy-posy to the grindstone

PATRICK Oh, well, there's no harm in that At Daddy's age there's nothing much for a chap to do except work

MARGERY I used to be sorry that he had no outside interests, but as things have turned out, I daresay it's all for the best

ALFRED You kiddie-widdies mustn't be extravagant, you know For some time your father won't have any spare cash to throw about

PATRICK I've thought of that I'm willing to do my bit We shall have to

make do with the family bus for a bit longer, Judy, old girl

JUDY It is sickening, isn't it? I suppose it can't be helped And we shan't be able to have a hard court either

MARGERY [starts making up] Call the others in, Judy There's no reason they should stay out any longer

JUDY All right [Goes to window] Dinah, Tim! Come in

MARGERY And then you'd better play tennis, if you want to

JUDY After all this excitement I couldn't hit a ball

ALFRED Are you going to play tennis? I'll just nip over the garden wall and change I don't mind showing you young things that there's life in the old dog yet just going to have a knock up

[DIANA and TIMOTHY run in ALFRED slaps TIM on back]

JUDY Dinah! Oh, my dear, we've had such a thrill Daddy's vanished, and we all thought he'd committed suicide And we were ruined and everything had to be sold, and now it's all right, and Daddy hasn't committed suicide after all

DIANA If you were going to tell us all about it, it seems hardly worth while to have turned us out of the room

JUDY I didn't want you to go It was grand Mummy was in hysterics And Pat was keeping a stiff upper lip and I was being the grave little woman

DIANA Do you mean to say it was all a false alarm?

TIMOTHY You know Alfred and his little jokes You oughtn't to let him get away with them He only gets above himself

ALFRED Now, then, young-feller-melad, not so much of your lip We're not out of the woody-poodie yet

PATRICK We're ruined all right

JUDY But the only difference it'll make is that Pat can't have a car of his own and we shall have to go on with the old coach until Daddy makes some more money

TIMOTHY I say, that's a bit thick

PATRICK If they can play on grass at Wimbledon, I suppose on a pinch we can too

ALFRED That's the spirit, old bean I'm jolly glad to see that you're taking it like a sportsman

DIANA And where's Uncle Charlie?

PATRICK We don't know that

MARGERY We wish we did We wish to goodness we did

JUDY We think he's lost his memory

and is sitting on a bench at Bournemouth in a top-hat

PATRICK He's much more likely to be at Southend

MARGERY Oh, no Even if your poor father had lost his memory, it would never occur to him to go to Southend [A door slams The door is opened, and CHARLES strolls amiably in He is a man in the early forties, quiet and of rather distinguished appearance, he is very neat in his black coat and gray striped trousers He wears a top-hat] Charlie!

CHARLES Hullo!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE—*The curtain rises on the scene as the curtain fell on Act I, the lines being repeated as follows*

DIANA And where's Uncle Charlie?

PATRICK We don't know that

MARGERY We wish we did We wish to goodness we did

JUDY We think he's lost his memory and is sitting on a bench at Bournemouth in a top-hat

PATRICK He's much more likely to be at Southend

MARGERY Oh, no Even if your poor father had lost his memory, it would never occur to him to go to Southend [A door slams The door is opened, and CHARLES strolls amiably in He is a man in the early forties, quiet and of rather distinguished appearance, he is very neat in his black coat and gray striped trousers He wears a top-hat] Charlie!

CHARLES Hullo!

[Taking off his hat]

MARGERY [much agitated] Where have you been? Oh, we've been so anxious It's too bad of you

CHARLES What have I done?

MARGERY The suspense has been too awful

DOROTHY Yes!

CHARLES [coolly] Why, what's the matter? Hullo, Pat! Home for the holidays?

PATRICK Hullo, Daddy

CHARLES You look all right Had a nice time your last term at school?

PATRICK Yes, grand

CHARLES How's everybody? [Goes to ALFRED] Back from the city early, Alfred? Don't tell me you're idling

ALFRED I say, old boy, where the devil have you been? I've been trying to get hold of you all day long

CHARLES I? I've been for a walk on Hampstead Heath

ALFRED A walk?

[General exclamation]

MARGERY All day?

CHARLES No, I found rather a jolly little pub and had lunch there A cut off the joint and a bottle of beer Very nice

ALFRED Why didn't you go to your office?

JUDY We were sure you'd committed suicide

PATRICK Judy wanted to have White-stone Pond dragged

MARGERY We've been so frightfully anxious, Charlie

CHARLES I may be very dense, but I don't quite understand what you're all talking about

ALFRED Well, old boy, I had to tell them You see, you didn't keep your appointment with me, and you hadn't turned up at the office

CHARLES Oh, I see [Amably] Well, now you know, don't you?

PATRICK We know it's all right, Daddy

ALFRED They were all so upset they persuaded me to call up Arthur Letter He told me what he'd done

CHARLES Sporting of him, wasn't it?

JUDY Were you absolutely broke, Daddy?

CHARLES I couldn't comply with my bargains

JUDY What does that mean?

CHARLES Well, when a broker can't comply with his bargains he's hammered

ALFRED And then he can't trade any more

CHARLES How are you, Dorothy? You've got a new hat on

DOROTHY D'you like it? How clever of you to notice [Business with hat]

ALFRED Look here, Charlie, we must have a talk Tim, you and Dinah had better make yourselves scarce

TIMOTHY All right

PATRICK Sorry, old man I'm afraid tennis looks like being a washout

TIMOTHY Oh, that's all right I know what these domestic upsets are

[CHARLES looks at PAT]

PATRICK It's one of the penalties of having a family

[DIANA and TIMOTHY saunter out]

DOROTHY Do you wish me to go too? [Half rises]

MARGERY [*rises*] No, stay, Dorothy I've got a presentiment that something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

ALFRED My dear, this is no time for culture

MARGERY I know, that's why I want Dorothy to stay There are moments when a woman wants another woman's support

ALFRED Where have you *been* all day, Charlie? I rang up every place I could think of

CHARLES I told you I've been for a walk on Hampstead Heath

ALFRED But you had an appointment to see me at ten

CHARLES [*smiling*] I can't tell you how excruciatingly the idea of seeing you at ten bored me

ALFRED Thank you You made the appointment yourself

MARGERY What did you do on the Heath?

CHARLES I walked I thought I admired the scenery

ALFRED When every minute was of vital importance?

CHARLES That too added to the charm of the prospect

PATRICK I don't wish to cast a gloom on the party, but it sounds to me as though Father were trying to be facetious

MARGERY Don't be so silly, Pat You know your father isn't like that

ALFRED [*shrewdly*] There's more in this than meets the eye I have no hesitation in saying that whatever

CHARLES It was a bad blow for me, you know, when Tommy Avon shot himself

[*He makes this remark conversationally, with deliberation, but not as though he attached great importance to what he was saying*]

ALFRED It was the best thing he could do If he hadn't, he'd have got fourteen years

CHARLES It cost me a packet

ALFRED And you're not the only one A lot of my clients have been hit

CHARLES I was proud of my firm I took a harmless vanity in the fact that my name stood so high on the Stock Exchange It was a great satisfaction to me to know that people pointed me out and said good fellow, Charlie Battle, safe as the Bank of England

ALFRED That's why Arthur Letter was willing to help you when you were up against it [*To JUDY*] Character is the best asset any man can have in the City

CHARLES When the crash came my

first thought was to save the firm I was prepared to sacrifice every bob I had to keep my head above water By George, there wasn't a stone I left unturned

ALFRED You don't have to tell me that No one could have done more

CHARLES And last night, at the eleventh hour, you might say, I did the trick I was saved I don't mind telling you it was a relief

ALFRED I'll bet it was

CHARLES You know this is settling day It had been a nightmare Last night I knew I could comply with my bargains All my savings had to go down the drain, but I didn't care a damn The old firm was saved, and my reputation was all right Funny thing, honor, isn't it? And the importance we attach to it I suppose it's the force of habit

JUDY You've been rather wonderful, Daddy No one could have guessed anything particular was happening, could they, Mummy?

MARGERY No, dear I never dreamt anything was wrong

CHARLES I'm glad of that I was afraid I'd been a trifle disagreeable

JUDY [*quite pleasantly*] No, not more than usual, darling

CHARLES I was in great spirits when I left the house this morning You'd have thought I'd made a fortune instead of lost one I walked to the tube as I've walked every morning, more or less, since I was demobbed I nodded to one or two people I knew All going down to the city just as I was I got to the station There was the usual crowd hurrying in Suddenly my heart sank

JUDY Why?

CHARLES [*rises and walks towards JUDY*] Well, my dear, you know once or twice during these last days it looked as though I couldn't pull through And as I lay awake at night turning things over I thought of what I'd do if I went broke I made pretty elaborate plans It relieved me I didn't see why I shouldn't make the best of a bad job Well, I weathered the storm, and I was in a position to start all over again I could go on quite quietly to the end of my life, doing what I'd done every day for the last twelve years, going down to the City and studying the markets, buying and selling stock Suddenly it seemed to me that for me ruin meant life and liberty—and that tube, with all those people hurrying to catch their train,

led to slavery and death So I went for a walk on Hampstead Heath

[Sits on settee]

MARGERY But, Charlie, my dear, that was only nerves I mean, that's the sort of thing we're all liable to, since the war All of us who went through that awful experience bear its mark I know I do

ALFRED Charlie, you haven't done so badly You've a nice house and a car, and you've kept your wife in the sort of way your position required You've sent your children to first-rate schools You had saved a bit of money

CHARLES Fifty thousand pounds, roughly

ALFRED It's true that through no fault of your own that's gone, but all the rest remains You've still got your position, and you can make more money I don't think you've got much to complain of

CHARLES Yes But sometimes, I couldn't help asking myself if I was meant to spend my life so tamely

PATRICK I shouldn't have thought it was tame

CHARLES [looks at PAT and then looks at watch] You've never been in the Stock Exchange, have you? Pity I didn't take you in one day It would have interested you

JUDY I thought strangers couldn't get in

CHARLES No, they're not allowed, and if they're caught they must expect to be hustled a bit They'll probably want a new hat

ALFRED You could have smuggled him in as one of your clerks No one would have taken any notice of him It's an amazing sight

CHARLES It's indescribable There's a hell of a row, you know

ALFRED Deafening

CHARLES Every one's yelling at the top of his voice, and men are rushing about like mad I must say at first there's something rather exhilarating about it That frantic activity does give you a thrilling sensation of life

ALFRED By Jove, it does

CHARLES Ever heard a man hammered, Alfred?

ALFRED No, no, I haven't

CHARLES It's impressive At three o'clock, as the hour strikes [the clock in the drawing-room strikes three] just as that clock is striking now [looks at clock on desk], the two waiters appear on the stands and take off their hats, as if to a

corpse They beat with a wooden mallet three times Fellows look up, and that deafening row stops Suddenly, as though it had been cut with a knife And it's so still you really couldn't hear a pin drop However often you've heard it, the sound of that mallet ringing through the deathly silence is frightening The waiter at the Consol Market end reads out a notice, and the waiter at the Mining Market end repeats it "Gentlemen, Mr Charles Battle, trading as Wargrave, Battle & Co., is unable to comply with his bargains" There's a moment's pause, and however hardened you are there's something tragic in it They're good fellows on the Stock Exchange, most of them, and a bit sentimental, and it gives one a pang to think some one's beaten It may have been just bad luck It may have been that one bit off more than one could chew If you're up you can afford to be sorry for the man who's down, and if you're shaky you wonder if it'll be your turn next Yes, just for a moment dismay fills all those hearts, and then, before you can say Jack Robinson, as suddenly as the row stopped, the row begins again Pandemonium Charles Laurence Battle, trading as Wargrave, Battle & Co., is forgotten The world has passed him by

[Pause Suddenly there is a ring on the telephone in the hall]

MARGERY See who it is, Judy

CHARLES If it's any one for me, I'm not at home Never mind how urgent

JUDY All right [She goes out]

ALFRED [rises and sits with CHARLES—cheerfully] Well, old boy, I'm glad you've escaped that It's true you've lost a packet, but you'll make it again While there's life, there's hope

DOROTHY Alfred, please! Have you been terribly anxious all these days, Charlie?

CHARLES I have, a bit

MARGERY Why didn't you tell me?

CHARLES Oh, my dear, there didn't seem any object in worrying you

[JUDY comes in again]

JUDY It's Mr Turner He wants awfully to speak to you, Daddy, and when I said you were out he seemed all fussed and bothered

CHARLES That's nice of him I hope you lied like my own daughter

JUDY He asked me if I knew where he could get hold of Uncle Alfred, and I told him he was here He's holding the line

ALFRED I wonder what *he* wants me for?

DOROTHY You'd better go and see, Alfred [ALFRED goes out]

MARGERY Charlie will this interfere with our summer holiday? [Pause]

DOROTHY Marge and I were thinking it would be so good for the children if we went down to the Riviera for a change

[Enter DIANA from garden]

MARGERY I like the river, but I do realize that it would be much more of an education for the children to take them to France And every one's going to Antibes now

JUDY Oh, Mummy, that would be too divine

DIANA And us too? Oh, Dorothy, it would be glorious

DOROTHY Well, I haven't spoken to your father about it yet Your Aunt Margery and I have been putting our heads together

MARGERY Of course, before all this happened

DOROTHY I suppose Charlie couldn't get away, but I'm sure he wouldn't mind your going We'd go to some cheap pension, and really I don't suppose it would be any more expensive than staying in England

MARGERY Naturally, we'd have to be frightfully economical

JUDY Oh, Daddy, do say yes It would be awful fun Wouldn't it, Pat?

PATRICK Not so dusty

[ALFRED, distraught, bursts into the room]

ALFRED Charlie, Charlie, he says you're hammered [PAT rises]

CHARLES [coolly] Well, what of it? ALFRED He's frightfully upset He said he understood everything had been arranged Charlie, it's not true, is it?

CHARLES [pauses Sardonicallly] Yes, my boy, the waiter went knocky-knocky with his little mallet, and poor old Charlie-parlie was blown sky high

ALFRED It's not true Charlie, you don't know what you're saying For God's sake, pull yourself together, old bean

MARGERY Oh, Charlie, what has happened?

ALFRED [emphatically] What do you mean, Charlie?

CHARLES Only that at the very moment that I was so dramatically describing to you what happens when a man is hammered on the Stock Exchange I was actually being hammered Don't you re-

member, I called your attention to the clock striking three?

PATRICK I hate these cheap theatrical effects

CHARLES I have a simple mind They get me every time

JUDY If one didn't know Daddy had no sense of humor, one would think he'd just been pulling our leg

CHARLES You see, as three o'clock approached and I knew what was going to happen, I felt a trifle lonely on Hampstead Heath I suddenly craved for the society of my fellows

MARGERY I can't believe it It's so fantastic

CHARLES They say that when the dying buffalo feels his end approaching he leaves his herd [looking round at PAT and JUDY] and retires into solitude In that respect I am unlike the dying buffalo

ALFRED It's not often I'm puzzled But I am now, and I don't mind admitting it You could have complied with your bargains perfectly well

CHARLES I didn't choose to

ALFRED And had Arthur Letter's check in your pocket

CHARLES I have it still [He takes a check out of his pocket and hands it to ALFRED] Perhaps you wouldn't mind sending it back to him and telling him that I made up my mind not to avail myself of his kindness

ALFRED There's more in this than meets the eye I have no hesitation in saying that

MARGERY But then we're ruined

DOROTHY Oh, Margery, how awful!

ALFRED You cut along, Dorothy

DOROTHY All right [To MARGERY] I'll be in the garden in case you want me, dear Come along, Dinah

MARGERY All right, dear

[DOROTHY goes out with DIANA]

JUDY D'you want us to go, Uncle Alfred? [Moves towards ALFRED]

CHARLES Oh, I think you'd better stay I have one or two things to say that a good deal concern you

PATRICK But if you're hammered, we're in the soup, Daddy

CHARLES Up to the neck, my boy

PATRICK I don't know what there is to be so damned cheerful about

ALFRED Neither do I, believe me Your father has let himself be hammered when he actually had in his pocket the means of saving himself

PATRICK But what's the big idea?

ALFRED Of course, he'd had a knock But he isn't the only one Why, I know brokers who've made and lost half a dozen fortunes in their time On the Stock Exchange you have to take the rough with the smooth

PATRICK That's when a fellow shows his grit, when he's down and out

CHARLES [*with a smile in his eyes*] True, my son You're presently going to have an opportunity of showing yours

ALFRED But how did you have the heart to let an old-established business like yours go to blazes?

CHARLES Well, I don't deny that when the clock struck three just now, it gave me a funny little feeling in the pit of my stomach

MARGERY [*emphatic*] Your poor father was so proud of the business, Charlie He always said there wasn't a more respectable firm in the city of London

ALFRED What are you going to do now?

CHARLES [*casually*] I'm going abroad

MARGERY [*in sudden agitation*] Charlie, you haven't done anything dreadful? They're not going to issue a warrant?

CHARLES No, no, my dear However dishonorable my conduct may be, I have done nothing that the law can take exception to

MARGERY [*helplessly*] One never knows with brokers It's such a funny profession

ALFRED My God, this is a pretty kettle of fish For goodness' sake, explain yourself, Charlie A man doesn't commit suicide for fun

CHARLES The explanation is very simple This morning I came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth it

ALFRED What?

CHARLES This life I've been leading For twelve mortal years I've been going down to the city in the same tube, I've spent the day buying and selling shares, for twelve mortal years I've come home every evening in the same tube And the world was rolling on and on I'm fed up Fed to the teeth I'm not going to be the drudge of respectability any longer I'm through Look [*He takes his glistening topper*] Here is the badge of my office This is the symbol of my position and my respectability Sleek, shining, new, and rakish Look at it [*Showing hat to all*] It represents the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice To hell with it!

[CHARLES flings the hat down on the floor, stamps on it, and kicks it away from him]

MARGERY Charlie, Charlie, Charlie! And you who were always so particular about your hats Oh, what is going to become of us now?

[Goes up stage, picks up hat and puts it on table, then crosses CHARLES, down R of settee]

PATRICK Are you obliged to be so melodramatic, Father?

CHARLES In moments of emoton we're all apt to fall into it, my dear boy

[Taking cigar case out of pocket]

JUDY And what about us, Daddy?

CHARLES [*pause*] I'm going to leave you [*Coming down in front of settee*]

PATRICK How long for?

CHARLES For good

PATRICK [*with the utmost surprise*] Why?

CHARLES [*very naturally*] Because I'm bored with you

PATRICK Bored with us? Bored with me and Judy?

CHARLES Yes, bored with you and Judy Aren't you bored with me?

[Lights cigar]

PATRICK That's different You're our father

CHARLES How is it different?

PATRICK People are always rather bored with their parents That's human nature

CHARLES Is it?

PATRICK After all, they belong to a different generation The middle-aged are naturally tedious

CHARLES [*smiling*] Has it never struck you that the middle-aged find the young tedious too?

PATRICK It certainly hasn't

CHARLES They do

PATRICK But why? They're not tedious

CHARLES Oh, aren't they?

PATRICK How can they be? They've got youth and high spirits They're brimming over with ideas Aren't they, Mummy?

MARGERY Yes, darling, of course

PATRICK It's absurd to say that Judy and I are boring What would this house be without us? A mausoleum At meals we're the life and soul of the party Aren't we, Judy?

JUDY Rather

PATRICK Ask any one you like, and they'll all tell you the same thing We've got the reputation all over Golders Green

for being *unusually* brilliant I mean—
[hesitant pause] —if you find us boring
it can only be on account of your own
stupidity

MARGERLY Oh, that is rude, Pat You
mustn't talk to your father like that

PATRICK He asked for it, and, damn
it all, what other explanation is there?

MARGERLY I don't know, darling

PATRICK It's so ungrateful

CHARLES I don't suppose you're more
boring than most young things of your
age I daresay it's only because I know
you better than you bore me more

PATRICK But isn't youth enough in
itself? You can't be so unintelligent as not
to realize that nowadays the only thing
that counts is youth And it's because
we've discovered that our generation is so
much ahead of every other You know
what I mean, Judy, don't you?

JUDY Of course I do In Daddy's
time, when they were young they just
wanted to be older

PATRICK That's right And we don't
We're young, and we want to enjoy our
youth For the first time in the world's
history we've realized the *immense* value
or it

MARGERLY Of course, it's lovely to be
young

PATRICK Your lives would be nothing
without us Think of the exhilaration
we bring, and the vitality and go I mean,
to say we're boring is perfectly out-
rageous, I don't want to blow my own
trumpet

CHARLES No! No!

PATRICK But I can honestly say
that's the last thing any one could call
Judy, and I think I can safely say that
she'd say the same about me

JUDY Absolutely

CHARLES [*amiably*] I wonder if it
has ever occurred to you how tiresome
the conversation of the young is to the
middle-aged Chatter, chatter, chatter,
about nothing at all Just to hear your-
selves speak And you take yourselves
with such appalling seriousness You know
nothing, and you haven't the sense to hold
your tongues You utter the most obvious
commonplace, with the air of having made
a world-shaking discovery You're so
solemn You're so self-satisfied You're so
dogmatic You're *inane* The only excuse
for you is that you're very young One
tries to have patience with you But, my
God, don't think we find you amusing!
We find you quite incredibly dull

[JUDY gives a smothered chuckle]

PATRICK Shut up, Judy, this is no
laughing matter I can tell you this
Daddy, this is the last time I take any
trouble to be gay and jolly and amusing
in this house God knows, it's been an up-
hill job, but I've done my best I've just
sweated my guts out But now I'm
through, definitely and absolutely through
JUDY But have you no affection for
us, Daddy?

CHARLES No I haven't

MARGERLY Oh, Charlie, what a cruel
thing to say! How can you help loving
your children?

CHARLES I rather liked them when
they were kids, but now they're grown
up I don't find them very interesting

PATRICK [*outraged*] But that's simply
unnatural

CHARLES D'you think it is? I don't
Of course, when they're small one's fond
of one's children One likes them as one
likes puppies or kittens They're dependent
on you, and that's rather touching They
think you're very marvelous, and that's
rather flattering But almost before you
know where you are, they're young men
and women with characters of their own
They're not part of you any more They're
individuals They're strangers Why *should*
you care for them? [*To MARGERLY*]

PATRICK Do you mean to say that
Judy and I mean no more to you than if
we were puppies or kittens?

CHARLES No, I mean that you don't
mean very much more to me than puppies
mean to their father when they're grown
into fine healthy young dogs

JUDY But you'd be sorry if we died,
Daddy?

CHARLES Wretched I've been fright-
fully worried when either of you has
been ill I was devoted to you then Per-
haps it's unfortunate that on the whole
you've both had robust health

PATRICK You can hardly expect us
to have a series of illnesses just to excite
your parental affection

CHARLES You're right, Pat I should
certainly congratulate myself on the ex-
cellent physique I was able to endow you
with

PATRICK I should have thought you'd
be so proud of us I've always been in the
first five in all my forms, and I was head
of my house I was captain of the first
eleven and in the first fifteen Any un-
prejudiced person would say I was rather
a credit to you.

CHARLES You know, to be proud of

one's children is really and truly only to be proud of oneself I'm not a vain man

PATRICK Well, I'm dished!

CHARLES Do you care very much for me, Pat?

MARGERV Of course he does, Charlie I've never known two more affectionate children

CHARLES Let him answer for himself

PATRICK I don't know what you mean I like you as a chap naturally likes his father You're not going about it exactly the right way to make me crazy over you

CHARLES I suppose if I died you'd cry a bit That would be nice of you and very proper But I'm all alive and kicking Don't you find me rather a nuisance? Don't you resent having to come to me for money, and my wanting to know how you're going to spend it?

PATRICK [*rises and goes down to back of seat*] Well, naturally, any fellow of my age wants to be his own master

CHARLES Hasn't it ever struck you that it would be grand to have a flat of your own?

PATRICK I don't see what that's got to do with it

CHARLES It doesn't suggest that you find the family circle precisely thrilling

PATRICK But you can't alter the facts of life It's human nature that parents should be frightfully fond of their children But they can't expect their children to be frightfully fond of them

MARGERV Oh, Pat

CHARLES I've come to the conclusion that two such clever and intelligent children as you are can get along quite comfortably without me And as that suits my convenience, I'm going to give you the opportunity of doing so

PATRICK But how are we to live? It means that Judy will just have to go on the streets

JUDY Don't be so silly, Pat You boys are so ignorant

PATRICK Well, if Father leaves us without a bob, there's nothing else you can do How am I to go up to Cambridge and read for the Bar?

CHARLES Are you still proposing to enter Parliament in the Labour interest?

PATRICK That's the idea ultimately, of course

CHARLES Don't you think the Labour party are beginning to fight a trifle shy of the people like you, who only joined

them when it looked like a good thing, and now grab all the plums?

PATRICK They want people of our class

CHARLES Have you ever reflected upon St Paul? He was a tentmaker, you know He got a lot of kudos out of it

PATRICK Damn it all, Father, we're talking seriously now, don't bring in religion

CHARLES You know, I believe it would *pay* you to become a working man A stoker, for instance, or a chimney sweep

PATRICK Me?

CHARLES Get to know the proletariat from the inside, my dear boy, and when you're all fighting for the spoils of office, you'll have the bulge over the Eton boy and the Oxford graduate

ALFRED You're talking through your hat, Charlie It's just when children are growing up and entering the world that they need a father's guidance You can't leave them in the lurch like that

CHARLES Oh, can't I? You wait and see

ALFRED Penniless?

CHARLES No, not exactly penniless That would require more fortitude than I possess

PATRICK But haven't you lost everything?

MARGERV Most brokers have something tucked away somewhere, Pat, that their creditors can't get at

CHARLES In order to comply with my bargains, I should have had to throw in the whole of my private fortune But I'm hammered I happen to have twenty thousand pounds' worth of bonds in a New York bank

PATRICK Oh! Have you?

[*Leans forward*]

CHARLES I must tell you that in honor I should hand it over to my creditors They have a moral right to it

ALFRED I'm afraid they have

CHARLES You see, my solicitor agrees with me There is no doubt in my mind that to keep it is a most ungentlemanly proceeding I propose, however, to do so

ALFRED Oh, Charlie, you can't

CHARLES Legally?

ALFRED Legally, of course you can But not morally I mean it would be frightfully bad form Your friends will think you a dirty dog

CHARLES And with justice But after mature reflection I've come to the con-

clusion that that won't impair my appetite or disturb my night's rest

[JUDY again gives a little laugh]

MARGERY [rises] Don't giggle, Judy This is frightfully serious Your father's honor is at stake

CHARLES There are two courses open to me The twenty thousand pounds I've saved from the wreck will bring in roughly about a thousand a year I can keep that for myself and subsist modestly on the income But I think it would be rather selfish

MARGERY My poor children They can't beg their bread in the streets of London

CHARLES I have a very sensitive conscience, and I'm not quite sure that I should be entirely happy if at moments the thought crossed my mind that my wife and children were in want

[MARGERY gives a start and looks at him with perplexity and consternation]

MARGERY But, Charlie

CHARLES [interrupting her] The other course is to hand the entire amount to them and go out into the world alone and destitute The gesture would be romantic but to my mind absurd I propose therefore to leave you fifteen thousand pounds and keep five thousand for myself The income from that will always prevent me from starving

MARGERY But aren't I to come with you?

[Crosses to settee]

CHARLES Oh, no, dear [PATRICK half rises JUDY pulls him back] That would be an awful bore for you

MARGERY [gasping] Oh! It never occurred to me for a moment you meant that

[Sits]

CHARLES Didn't it? I thought I made it quite clear

MARGERY It never dawned on me Was it clear to you, Alfred?

ALFRED Don't ask me, Margery I don't know if I'm standing on my head or my heels

MARGERY But I don't understand It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life You can't tell your wife that you're going to leave her just like that, in the course of conversation Without a row or a scene or anything Like a chauffeur giving notice because he wants to better himself

CHARLES No, not like that Like an old family retainer breaking it gently to his employers that advancing years oblige

MARGERY Oh, it's absurd You've got no reason to leave me and the children

CHARLES I've been a husband and a father long enough I think one should always abandon an occupation when it has ceased to be a source of pleasure and profit

[Looking at PATRICK and JUDY and then MARGERY]

MARGERY But do I bore you, Charlie?

CHARLES A bit

MARGERY He's not sane, Alfred

ALFRED Well, that's what I've been thinking myself My belief is, Charlie, that you're completely potty

CHARLES Don't you think I'd know if I were?

MARGERY Even their nearest and dearest don't know sometimes Thank God, it's never been in my family [A ring on the telephone is heard] Oh, bother

CHARLES See who it is, Pat If it's any one for me I'm out

[PATRICK goes without a word]

MARGERY I thought you meant me to come with you I thought your idea was that we should settle down in some place in France or Italy where we could live cheaply and play golf

CHARLES You'd have hated that Margery

MARGERY I shouldn't have liked it, but I am your wife, and if I'd really thought it my duty I'd have consented And of course we might have got to know some very nice people

CHARLES I would never dream of asking you to make such a sacrifice

[PATRICK comes in]

PATRICK It's Mr Turner I told him you were here, and he's holding on

CHARLES Oh damn

[He goes out quickly]

MARGERY Oh, Alfred, what shall we do?

ALFRED Well, my dear, I think you'd better let me have a talk to Charles alone I'm used to dealing with matters of this sort, and my experience is that it's much better for a friend of both parties to step in before anything irreparable is said on either side

MARGERY I'm so flabbergasted, Alfred I mean it's so strange that Charlie should turn after all these years

JUDY [rises] Come on, Mummy, If Uncle Alfred wants us to get out, we'd better nip before Daddy comes back

ALFRED I'm sure it's wiser I can find out exactly how the land lies

MARGERY If he'd made a point of my going with him I should have said to him "Charlie, I am not only a wife, but a mother, I cannot leave my children And if you feel that I mean nothing to you any more—then you must go" And we might have arranged an amicable separation But if he doesn't want me, the situation is entirely different

ALFRED At the first glance, I don't quite see how

MARGERY It's obvious I won't let myself be treated like that for a moment I have my woman's dignity to think of

ALFRED Oh, yes, of course I'd forgotten that Now, you popoffski, my dear

MARGERY Very well

PATRICK Of course, I think he's off his chump I mean, to say that we're dull, why, it doesn't begin to have any sense

[Goes out through French window]

MARGERY I wonder if it would be wise to send for a doctor [To JUDY] Give me your father's hat, darling

JUDY [picking it up from table] Here you are

MARGERY [pressing it to her bosom] It's like a poor little baby brutally done to death It reminds me of those Armenian folk songs

[Goes off through alcove ALFRED alone He goes up stage, lights cigarette, and takes check from pocket]

ALFRED Tch, tch, tch!

[CHARLES reenters]

CHARLES Hullo, where are the others?

ALFRED I packed them off I wanted to have a word with you alone

CHARLES That was Bertie Turner on the 'phone

ALFRED What did he want?

CHARLES [with a little smile, at table] H'm Good fellow He and some of the lads have gone together, and they've offered to put up all the money to settle so that I can get back into the House

ALFRED By jingo!

CHARLES The founder of the Christian Religion was a good judge of character, wasn't he? It's so much harder to resist kindness than brute force

ALFRED [eagerly] Have you accepted? [Rises]

CHARLES No, I couldn't But I was so shaken I had to be a bit short with him I told him to mind his own damned business and rang off

ALFRED Oh, Charlie, how could you be such a damned fool?

CHARLES Don't nag me now, Alfred I'm a bit shattered

ALFRED I'm not going to nag you, old boy But now that we're alone, let's get down to brass tacks Gloves off and cards on the table and all that sort of thing What's the little game?

CHARLES [recovering himself] I wonder what you're talking about now, Alfred?

ALFRED [very hearty] Go on with you, Charlie Now you tell your uncle Alfred the truthie-puthie There's a woman in this Deny it if you can

CHARLES I do

ALFRED You can't throw dust in Uncle Alfred's eyes like that Uncle Alfred wasn't born yesterday If you've let your business go to old billy-o and you're leaving your wife and family, it's for a woman, or I'll eat my hat

CHARLES [good-naturedly] Eat it, then

ALFRED Oh, come off it, Charlie You can trust an old friend Uncle Alfred's a man of the world I know you've been married nineteen years A chap wants a change now and then I'm not going to blame you if you've got stuck on a little bit Have your fun if you want to Life is short, and we're dead a long time But be reasonable about it One doesn't break up a happy home for a little bit of fluff I mean—well, you know what I mean The game isn't worth the candle Don't do it, old boy, don't do it

CHARLES My dear Alfred, you know more about little bits of fluff than I do

ALFRED [sits, archly, lying back] My business brings me in contact with them now and then And I'm human [Smiles] But I never let them interfere with my home life No, sir

CHARLES Have you ever met a little bit of fluff who was prepared to share the life of a middle-aged man with two hundred and fifty pounds a year?

ALFRED I wondered at the time if Margery hadn't hit the nail on the head when she hinted that you had a tidy little sum tucked away somewhere

CHARLES Not a bob

ALFRED Do you mean to tell me that you expect to live on five quid a week?

CHARLES It's enough to provide me with the necessities of existence The good thing about luxury is that when you've had it, you can so very easily do without

it If I'd never had a car I should always have hankered after one I've had one for twenty years, and now I'm perfectly willing to walk on my flat feet But I don't want to waste my time on work whose only object is to keep body and soul together

ALFRED Well, if you not going off with a woman, I'm blowed if I see why you *are* going off?

CHARLES I'm not prepared to waste the rest of my life doing things that bore me for people in whom I take no interest I hanker after my own company You see, I think I've done all that I'm called upon to do for those dependent on me, I want the future for myself

ALFRED What are you going to do with it?

CHARLES I don't know I shall see

ALFRED You must have *some* idea at the back of your head

CHARLES I have only one life, when I look back and think of all the fellows who were killed in the war, I think I'd like to make more use of it than just buying and selling shares and making or losing a fortune

ALFRED Oh, my dear boy, you're just talking through your hat We hear a lot about women leading their own lives I think it's all tommy-rot myself, but there it is, and we've got to put up with it But whoever heard of a man leading his own life? It's not done

CHARLES Don't you think it's rather a pretty compliment we pay the other sex, if we sometimes take a leaf out of *their* book?

ALFRED Do you think I don't get a bit restless sometimes? [*Sits up and looks around*] Dorothy's the best woman in the world, but now and again she's rather tiresome Women are, you know And sometimes on Monday morning I don't much want to go down to the office But I say to myself "Now, then, Alf-palfy, this won't do, you know Shoulder to the wheel, old boy"

CHARLES And your reward is the esteem of your wife and the respect of your fellow citizens

ALFRED What do you suppose would happen to society if everybody behaved like you? I mean, it would be the end of progress and civilization and the whole bag of tricks

CHARLES I think it's very silly to say that you should only do the things that you think every one else should do The

great majority are *quite* content 'to travel in the same old rut from the cradle to the grave Well, let them I don't blame them

ALFRED It's such *madness* to change your whole way of life and break up your home on a moment's impulse You've only thought about it for a few hours

CHARLES I've only thought about it for a few hours with my head I've thought about it for twelve years with my belly

ALFRED You'll regret it You'll never stop regretting it

CHARLES One has to take that risk Who'd marry if he was afraid he'd regret it later?

ALFRED You'll never be happy, you know

CHARLES I don't see why not I have a capacity for enjoyment, a placid disposition and few wants

[*DOROTHY comes from staircase and looks in, comes down to table back of settee*]

DOROTHY I'm sorry to interrupt you Margery wants to know what is happening

ALFRED Has Margery told you?

DOROTHY Yes Can she come down now?

ALFRED Charles?

CHARLES I shall be ready in a few minutes I'm just going upstairs to change and pack [*Starts to go up*]

DOROTHY [*taken aback*] You're not going now? [*Stops him*]

CHARLES Yes When you've made up your mind to do a thing it's better to do it at once

ALFRED But you can't go to-day Charlie

CHARLES Why not? I'm only taking a handbag

ALFRED Your affairs are in a god-awful mess There are a thousand things to arrange

CHARLES Nothing that I can't leave in your hands, Alfred You're a highly competent solicitor

ALFRED It looks so damned fishy, your running away like this I mean, there's sure to be a bit of a rumpus It's only decent for you to stay and face the music

CHARLES [*gaily*] I don't agree with you at all I think it's much more elegant to slip out quietly through the artists' entrance

[*CHARLES goes quickly and*—]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

The curtain rises within the lines from
ALFRED

ALFRED But you can't go to-day,
Charlie

CHARLES Why not? I'm only taking
a handbag

ALFRED Your affairs are in a god-
awful mess There are a thousand things
to arrange

CHARLES Nothing that I can't leave
in your hands, Alfred You're a highly
competent solicitor

ALFRED It looks so damned fishy,
your running away like this I mean,
there's sure to be a bit of a rumpus It's
only decent for you to stay and face the
music

CHARLES [*gaily*] I don't agree with
you at all I think it's much more elegant
to slip out quietly through the artists'
entrance

[*CHARLES goes quickly*]
DOROTHY Can you make head or
tail of it, Alfred?

ALFRED I think I know a thing or
two about human nature, and I'm con-
vinced there's a woman in it

DOROTHY Have you told him that?

ALFRED Yes He denies it

DOROTHY Of course he'd do that

ALFRED How have he and Margery
been getting on lately?

DOROTHY Oh, all right, like they
always have Of course, she had her own
interests, and he was in the city all day
I shouldn't call either of them very pas-
sionate people

ALFRED Well, just the ordinary typi-
cal married couple, I suppose I don't see
that either of them had anything to com-
plain of

DOROTHY I shouldn't have thought
so

ALFRED Has he been going about
with anybody?

DOROTHY I haven't heard of it

ALFRED You'd better ask Margery If
a man's in love with somebody else his
wife generally has *some suspicion*

DOROTHY I'm sure if she had she'd
have told me We tell one another every-
thing

ALFRED If a fellow is prepared to
chuck everything, his business and his
family and the whole bag of tricks, it
must be for some *reason*

DOROTHY Oh, yes, I don't suppose
he'd do it just for fun

ALFRED I've been a solicitor for a
good many years, and my experience is
that there are only two things that mat-
ter to a *normal* man One's money and
the other's women!

DOROTHY If any one knows, you
ought to, Alfred

ALFRED Well, I mean, what else is
there? [*Turning away*]

DOROTHY [*pauses*] You don't think
he might have some spiritual motive?

ALFRED Of course, there's a possi-
bility of that He may not be quite right
in his head

DOROTHY I didn't mean that exactly
I was wondering if he isn't doing this on
account of some ideal

ALFRED Come off it, popsy-woppsy
You've been reading too many novels
business men don't do things for an ideal

DOROTHY He's never been quite nor-
mal since the war

ALFRED He's a thundering good chap,
and I hate to see him make a damned
fool of himself [*Kicks stool*]

DOROTHY Well, what's to be done?

ALFRED I think the only person who
can do anything is Margery Pity she isn't
a bit more intelligent

DOROTHY It's not easy for a woman
to be intelligent with a man who isn't in
love with her

ALFRED Charlie's an emotional fellow,
and, hang it all, she's a woman She ought
to be able to get round him somehow

DOROTHY Five o'clock in the after-
noon isn't a very good time for emotion

ALFRED If you'd been mixed up in
as many divorce cases as I have you
wouldn't say that Look here, you talk
to her You can give her a lead I'll go
along and send her down It's a bit awk-
ward for me

DOROTHY I'll do what I can

ALFRED I know you will, old gal

[*ALFRED goes off upstairs DOROTHY*
rises, goes to table, looks towards
staircase, picks up photograph DIANA
comes in as DOROTHY lays photo-
graph down DOROTHY looks at it
and then takes paper from round
table and sits on settee]

DOROTHY I wonder!

DIANA Hulloa, Dorothy! Are you
alone?

DOROTHY Is there anything you
want?

DIANA I was looking for Uncle Char-
lie

DOROTHY Why?

DIANA I just wanted to say good-bye to him

DOROTHY Oh, are you going?

DIANA No, but I thought he was

DOROTHY Run along, darling, I'm busy. If there's anything to tell, I'll tell you later

[*MARGERY comes in quickly, and with her first words DIANA slips out*]

MARGERY Alfred says you've got something to say to me

DOROTHY [*hesitant*] He thought I'd better speak to you before you saw Charlie

MARGERY Where is Charlie?

DOROTHY Upstairs. He's packing

MARGERY [*dumbfounded*] Packing? He isn't really going?

DOROTHY I'm afraid so

MARGERY To day?

DOROTHY Now

MARGERY [*with a gasp*] Oh! I never thought for a moment that he meant it. I thought he was hysterical and just making a scene

DOROTHY Don't take it too tragically, darling. He'll come back

MARGERY What to? He won't have any business. We shan't have anything to live on

DOROTHY Had you no suspicion that anything was wrong?

MARGERY With the business? No, he never talked to me about it. He knew I *hated* shop

DOROTHY No. I meant at home

MARGERY No, he always seemed just the same. I never paid much attention to him. Why should I?

DOROTHY That's true

[*Turning away*]

MARGERY I think it's so frightfully selfish of him! If a man loses his money it's his duty to work hard and make some more

DOROTHY D'you think he's in love with some one else?

MARGERY Oh, no, I should have noticed that at once

DOROTHY Well, I always had an idea that Charlie hankered after *something different*

MARGERY I don't know what I've been a perfect wife

DOROTHY Perhaps you didn't bring enough beauty into his life

MARGERY Dorothy, how can you be so unkind? Oh, I think it's dreadful to say a thing like that when I'm so upset. I surrounded him with beauty. Every one

knows how much beauty means to me. Painting and books and all that sort of thing. How about Czecho-Slovak peasant industries? I organized them. It was a revelation of beauty. And the Armenian folk songs. Who'd heard of Armenian folk songs until I discovered them? No one's keener about beauty than I am. I'm crazy about it. I practically *made* beauty in Golders Green

DOROTHY I'm dreadfully sorry, darling. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings

MARGERY What's wrong with Charlie is that he's got no sense of humor

DOROTHY It's a pity Alfred can't give him some of his. Alfred has almost too much

MARGERY I'm in a frightful position, Dorothy. You know how spiteful people are. When a woman leaves her husband they say it's because he was a brute, but when a man leaves his wife, they say it's because she couldn't hold him. It's so frightfully humiliating

DOROTHY What are you going to say to him?

MARGERY I shall just appeal to his better nature. After all, he's a reasonable man. He must see that he can't leave the children just when they're entering the world and need his help and guidance more than ever

DOROTHY Oh, my dear, men *aren't* reasonable. They're not like women. You surely know that by now. The only way you can influence them is through their emotions. I mean, the great advantage we have over them is that they're weak and sentimental. In your place I'd just be terribly pathetic. I'd cling to him and just cry like a child

MARGERY I've never been able to cry when I wanted to. It's always been a handicap

DOROTHY It's no good saying that now. It's the only thing that gets a man every time. You know what I mean. Flatter him, be soft and loving and tender. Oh, my dear, I could do it

MARGERY It's so difficult after all these years. I'm afraid he'll laugh. I almost think it would be better if you saw him first, Dorothy. I think it would be easier for you

DOROTHY But, darling, I can't be loving and tender for you. I mean, that's the kind of thing you must do for yourself

MARGERY Yes, I know, but you can prepare him. Tell him you know for a fact that I'm frightfully in love with him.

DOROTHY Yes, I could do that

MARGERY I daresay you're right I suppose I haven't flattered him enough One always forgets how vain men are

DOROTHY It's fatal when one does All right, I'll see what I can do I'll call him

MARGERY [*rises and goes off through French window*] You're a brick, Dorothy I shall be in the garden

[MARGERY goes out through the French window, and DOROTHY goes to alcove and off stage]

DOROTHY Charlie! [DIANA slips into the room and tiptoes to arch, but she hears her mother's voice and slips quickly away] Charlie! Will you come down? I've got something to say to you!

[She comes back into the room, powders face, looks round, sighs The door opens and CHARLES comes in He has changed into a lounge suit]

CHARLES Here I am

DOROTHY [*a trifle solemnly, as though she were speaking of a corpse*] I've just been talking to Margery

CHARLES Yes?

DOROTHY She is dreadfully unhappy

CHARLES [*coolly*] Peeved and exasperated Not unhappy

DOROTHY You don't know her

CHARLES After nineteen years of marriage? Don't be silly I know Margery as well as it's possible for one human being to know another

DOROTHY She's very reserved

CHARLES A trifle phlegmatic even

[*Filling cigarette case*]

DOROTHY What a cruel thing to say, Charlie!

CHARLES Not at all It's not an unpleasant trait in a wife It makes for peace in the home

DOROTHY I wonder if you realize how deeply attached to you Margery really is?

CHARLES You wouldn't say she was madly in love with me, would you?

DOROTHY Yes, I would I really would She adores you

CHARLES Don't talk such rubbish You know just as well as I do that Margery doesn't care two hoots for me

DOROTHY No, no, no! She loves you Oh, Charlie, it's such a serious step you're taking

CHARLES [*with a slight change of tone*] And I'm taking it seriously Believe me, my dear, nothing that you can say is

going to have any effect on me You're only wasting your breath and my time

[*Moves as if to go up*]

DOROTHY [*rises and stops him*] I should never forgive myself if I didn't do everything I could to stop you

CHARLES Forgive me, but exactly what business is it of yours

DOROTHY [*holds his hand—with a little helpless gesture*] Well, you see, I happen to know why you're going

CHARLES I'm not surprised, considering that I took the greatest pains to explain it to Margery and Alfred

DOROTHY Oh, all that about freedom and not wanting to be a broker? You don't suppose I believe that

CHARLES All the same, it's the truth DOROTHY D'you think I haven't got eyes in my head? [*Goes to him*]

CHARLES Very handsome ones, and you make excellent use of them But what have they got to do with it?

DOROTHY Well, it's me, isn't it?

CHARLES [*astounded*] You!

DOROTHY [*with self-satisfaction*] I thought it was

CHARLES Why?

DOROTHY D'you think I haven't noticed how you looked at me? D'you remember kissing me the other night?

CHARLES Not particularly I've kissed you a thousand times

DOROTHY Not like that You may have thought you were kissing me the same as always But you weren't I know After all, it was me you kissed

CHARLES It was quite unintentional

DOROTHY I know That's why it gave you away

CHARLES My dear Dorothy

DOROTHY [*interrupting*] No, no, no, don't Don't speak Let me speak I know so well what you've got to say There's Alfred your oldest friend, and Margery my first cousin, and the children, your children and my children Oh, it's all hopeless, hopeless I've seen you brooding over the misery of it, and my heart has bled for you Oh, Charlie, Charlie, you don't have to tell me I know everything

[*Pulls him down on settee*]

CHARLES Look here, Dorothy, you put me in a very awkward position

[*Tries to get up, but DOROTHY pulls him back*]

DOROTHY And d'you think you haven't put me in an awkward position? Do you think I could sit there and know that those great, sad, tragic eyes of yours were resting upon me without being stirred

to the depths of my soul? Of course, I know that Margery never understood you Oh, my dear, my dear, I've been so sorry for you But, Charlie, we can do nothing What can we do? What can we do?

CHARLES We can talk not quite so loud [*Hoarse whisper*]

DOROTHY Oh, there's nobody about

CHARLES But, in point of fact, why are you saying all this?

DOROTHY Don't you know?

CHARLES I haven't a notion

DOROTHY Oh, Charles, Charles, what a fool you must think me! I know you love me

CHARLES How?

DOROTHY Intuition D'you think that ever fails a woman in a matter like this?

CHARLES Ah, I'd forgotten that

DOROTHY I've seen your face grow pale with desire when you touched my hand I've seen you bite your tongue in order to prevent yourself from speaking Oh, I know of course you couldn't speak, it was so brave of you—don't think I didn't realize how brave you were—but this last moment, does it matter? I can't let you go without telling you that I know Don't ask me to tell you that perhaps I love you too No, no, no

CHARLES I don't for a moment think you do

DOROTHY I don't know Don't ask me Don't force me to say more than I want to Oh, Charlie, when they came and told me you were going away, and in a flash I knew that it was on account of me—"Oh, what shall I do?" I cried to myself It's awful that you should make such a sacrifice for me I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

CHARLES You know, one finds that after a time one can bear the sacrifices that other people make for one!

DOROTHY I must bear it Oh, but you don't know what bitterness it is I know if I were a brave woman I would throw everything to the winds and come with you Don't ask me to do that, Charlie Don't tempt me

CHARLES No, no

DOROTHY [*turns to CHARLES*] You're so wonderful It's no good pretending to be something I'm not I haven't the courage I know you'll despise me, but perhaps also some day you'll find room in your heart for a little pity

CHARLES I'm sure you're very happy with Alfred

DOROTHY Happy! Happy! Who is happy? Oh, I think life is so sad

CHARLES It has moments when one seems justified in taking a moderately cheerful view of things

DOROTHY Oh, you're bitter I've disappointed you It's no good, Charlie, I can't run away with you Be sensible, old boy What should we live on? Is it true that you'll only have five pounds a week?

CHARLES Quite true

DOROTHY It's no good, darling I know you'll think me hard and worldly I'm only being cruel to be kind Love can't live on five pounds a week [*He looks at her*] It would be criminal to put it to such a test You do understand, don't you?

CHARLES Quite

DOROTHY It would be different if you had a hundred thousand pounds tucked away in a Swiss bank

CHARLES Quite, quite

DOROTHY I'm not really cynical, you know Only I am a woman, and I know what money means

CHARLES I always think that is one of the most delightful characteristics of your sex

DOROTHY Perhaps in years to come we shall meet again, in Paris or somewhere, and perhaps I shall say to you Charles, Charles, we've waited long enough, we have such a little time before us, let us accept the happiness that chance has so mysteriously thrown in our way

[*CHARLES rises and moves, she gets up and stops him*]

CHARLES Now, I think, if you don't mind, I'll just go up and finish my packing

DOROTHY I can't let you go without giving you something to remember me by Charlie, kiss me on the mouth [*CHARLES looks round the room with embarrassment, he is very nervous in case some one should come in by the door or the French window Then he kisses DOROTHY full on the lips She flings her arms round his neck He takes her hands and releases himself*] I have given you more than my body, Charlie, I have given you my soul Good bye [*Drops down*] Good-bye forever

[*She walks swiftly out into the garden, with heroic courage mastering her emotion CHARLES stands for a moment, smiling wryly after her, he passes a finger round his collar, which seems rather tight for him, and then, smiling a little still, crosses to chair DIANA enters*]

CHARLES Hulloo, what are you doing there? *[From desk]*

DIANA I've just been hanging about till Dorothy was out of the way I've got something I want to say to you

CHARLES Fire away

DIANA Has she been trying to vamp you?

CHARLES It would be rather late in the day for that

DIANA I bet she thinks you're leaving Aunt Margery on her account

CHARLES You've been listening, Dinah, my dear Not a very pretty trick
DIANA Don't be stuffy, darling I don't have to listen at doors to know what Dorothy's saying

CHARLES Mutual sympathy, I suppose One of the disadvantages of a united family

DIANA Poor Dorothy has reached the age when women think every man they meet is in love with them It's such a bore when they get like that It makes them so unpunctual

CHARLES Oh, why?

DIANA You see, they start doing their faces, and they say "Oh, my God, my face is awful to-day," and they start again, and they go on and on, and by the time they've given it up as a bad job they've kept you waiting for hours

CHARLES *[comes down below settee with A B C]* My dear, I've still got a few things to pack What was it exactly you wanted to say to me?

DIANA Oh, don't you like general conversation?

CHARLES Is that what it was? I thought you were making a few tart remarks on your mother

DIANA I adore Dorothy I'm sorry for her You know, I think it's so pathetic, her gratitude when she can persuade herself she's got off with somebody

CHARLES It's nice of you to be so sympathetic I must bolt now *[Turns to her]* Good-bye, my dear We've had a jolly little chat

DIANA Oh! *[Grasps him and pushes him into chair]* But I haven't started yet I've been trying to get you alone for the last hour

CHARLES You know, my dear, I'm going away to-night

DIANA Yes Would you like me to come with you?

CHARLES What for?

DIANA Company

CHARLES *[looking at A B C]* That's

awfully sweet of you, but I shall manage all right by myself

DIANA Won't you be awfully lovely by yourself?

CHARLES After being married nineteen years, I'm used to loneliness

DIANA A girl's different from a wife, you know

CHARLES Quite Even more of a nuisance

DIANA I'd look after myself I wouldn't be any trouble to you

CHARLES Whatever put such an idea into your head, Dinah?

DIANA I'm so bored at home After all, I'm eighteen, and the time's just flying, and I'm getting nowhere I want to get out into the world and do something

CHARLES That's all right, but a married gentleman in the early forties is hardly the best companion for such an adventure

DIANA Why not?

CHARLES My dear, ancient as I am, I'm afraid it would be difficult to persuade the people we ran across that my relation towards you was simply paternal

DIANA I'm not a damned fool, darling Of course, I'd come as your mistress

[Sits facing him on rug]

CHARLES Oh, I see It hadn't occurred to me that you meant that

[Putting A B C down in chair]

DIANA I think you must be rather stupid, darling

CHARLES To tell the truth, I don't want a mistress

DIANA Why not? You're not so old as all that

CHARLES I should prefer any attachments I make to be of a strictly temporary nature

DIANA You could always chuck me if you got sick of me

CHARLES Women are so clinging

DIANA Don't you think I'm attractive?

CHARLES Very

DIANA And I've never had an affair with any one

CHARLES I never thought you had

DIANA *[somewhat hurt]* I don't know why Lots of girls of my age have

CHARLES I think virtue is rather a pleasing trait in the young unmarried female

DIANA That's rather middle-aged of you, darling

CHARLES I am rather middle-aged, my pet

DIANA Tim hasn't either

CHARLES What?

DIANA Had an affair I think it's rather chic in a boy

CHARLES It doesn't interest me so much

DIANA He says he's going to wait for Potiphar's wife to make the usual advances to him, and then it'll be such a pleasant surprise for her

CHARLES Or contrariwise Innocence is charming in theory, but in practice experience has many advantages

DIANA You're not going to turn me down?

CHARLES You bet your life I am

DIANA You needn't hesitate because you're afraid I don't realize what I'm up against I should go into it with my eyes open you know

CHARLES I wasn't thinking of you I was thinking entirely of myself I should be a fool to jump out of a tepid frying-pan into a red-hot fire

DIANA It would be *such* a lark

CHARLES It wouldn't really I haven't a bean, you know Love can't live on five pounds a week

DIANA Hullo, that sounds like Dorothy Have you been asking her to run away with you?

[*Leans forward on his knees*]

CHARLES Certainly not

DIANA Swear to God?

CHARLES Cross me heart

DIANA All right As a matter of fact, I've thought of that You wouldn't have any silly prejudices about my keeping you would you? [*Folds arms on his knees*]

CHARLES Not at all I trust that in the well-regulated society of the future that will be the universal practice Women, with their executive ability and natural industry, will toil from blushing dawn to dewy eve and leave men free to devote themselves to art and literature and the less violent forms of athletics

DIANA Don't talk rot Listen to what I've thought You know every one says I dance divinely I can easily get up stage dancing, and then I'll get engagements at the Casinos in France and Italy

CHARLES I don't believe there's much money in that, do you? I've always said that if I was kept by a woman I'd want to be kept in style

DIANA No, but wait That's why I said I'd get engagements at Casinos [*Gets up onto knees*] A lot of rich men go to them, and when I see that there's one attracted to me, I can lure him on, and then, at the psychological moment you

can come in and say "What are you doing with my daughter?" D'you see what I mean?

CHARLES Yes, that's all right in the pictures, but in real life it always ends you up in jug It's no good I'd never have the nerve for that

DIANA I suppose that means that you don't want me at any price?

[*Looking away from him*]

CHARLES To be frank with you, it does [*DIANA sighs*] Oh, come on, don't sigh

DIANA I'm so frightfully disappointed

CHARLES You'd be bored stiff with me in a month And where would you be then?

DIANA I could always have left you After all, you're not the only man in the world I don't suppose it would have lasted forever, but while it did it might have been rather lovely

[*Smiling*]

CHARLES I think in your place I'd wait till some suitable young man comes along and marry him You can always see then, you know

DIANA [*goes round to him*] I can't understand why you hesitate I should have thought it such a snip

[*Sits on settee*]

CHARLES To run away with you? No, it's not my idea of a *snip* at all

DIANA You haven't got moral scruples, have you?

[*Leaning over right arm of settee*]

CHARLES [*goes to her—hand under her chin*] Do you think it would be very nice of me to bolt with the daughter of an old friend, and she only just out of the schoolroom, so to speak?

DIANA Everybody's the daughter of some one, and surely it's better to run away with a girl than with an old hag

CHARLES I imagine it's more agreeable

DIANA If you won't have me because you think it's dishonorable, or rot like that, I think it's simply foul of you I mean that's just stuffy and frightfully middle-class

CHARLES Oh, d'you think it is?

DIANA Of course I'd never forgive you if it was that

CHARLES I'm sorry

DIANA But if it's just that I don't appeal to you sexually, then I don't mind it a bit I mean, it's rotten for me, of course, but that's the sort of thing you can't help, and I must lump it Is that it?

CHARLES My dear, that's not a very

nice thing for a man, even a middle-aged one, to say to a girl of eighteen

DIANA [*turns away from him*] Oh, shut up! It never occurred to me that you might [*She stifles a little sob*]

CHARLES Good God! What are you doing? You're not crying? What on earth are you crying for?

DIANA You see, I'm so frightfully in love with you

CHARLES [*with astonishment*] With me? You never said that before

DIANA I didn't want to appeal to your emotions I wanted to make it practically a business proposition I'm simply crazy about you

CHARLES [*angrily—sits, takes her shoulder, and turns her round*] You damned little fool, what rot is this you're talking now?

DIANA It isn't rot I'm madly in love with you

CHARLES Well, you jolly well stop it I never heard such nonsense

DIANA I can't help it

CHARLES Yes, you can help it You're just a silly, hysterical, sloppy schoolgirl What you want is a thorough spanking, and by George, if I weren't in such a hurry—[*looks at watch*—I'd damned well give it you myself

DIANA [*smiling through her tears*] You are rather sweet, you know

[*Arm on his shoulder*]

CHARLES Upon my soul! [*Puts her arm away—changing his mood and laughing*] Don't be a little idiot, Diana Fancy falling in love with a funny old thing like me You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

DIANA I'm not And I can't help it I've got an awful thing about you I think you're so frightfully attractive

CHARLES Why?

DIANA Well, you have no sense of humor

CHARLES You're not going to tell me that you fell in love with me because I had no sense of humor

DIANA Yes, madly You knew you had no sense of humor, didn't you?

CHARLES I didn't, to tell you the truth

DIANA No People who haven't seldom know it Funny, isn't it? [*Moves a little nearer to him*] You see, all my family have so much, sometimes it's almost unbearable I love you for not having it You can understand that, can't you?

CHARLES Perfectly But what a bore it would have been if you'd discovered

you'd made a mistake, when it was too late

DIANA How d'you mean?

CHARLES Well, you see, our happiness might have been shattered if I'd made a joke

DIANA [*tenderly—hand on his arm*] Perhaps I shouldn't have seen it You know, one often doesn't see the jokes of people who have no sense of humor

CHARLES I think it's just as well not to have taken the risk

DIANA You might kiss me once, will you? [*Rises*]

CHARLES Of course, and then I really must see about my packing!

[*She takes his hand and pulls him up He goes to her and is about to put his arms around her She looks at his lips, peering a little, then she passes her forefinger over them and smells it*]

DIANA I wish Dorothy wouldn't use such moldy lipstick Wipe your mouth, darling [*DIANA gives him handkerchief He wipes lips She throws her arm around his neck and offers him her lips, but he takes her head in his hands and kisses her good-humoredly, first on one cheek and then on the other She sighs as he releases her*] Lend me your comb, darling

CHARLES My comb? I haven't got one

DIANA Then what do you do when you're out somewhere and want to comb your hair? All the boys I know carry one [*Sighs*] Darling, I could have taught you so much

CHARLES [*with a glance at his watch*] Where do you suppose Pat and Judy are?

DIANA Judy's in the garden

CHARLES [*goes to French window and calls*] Judy!

DIANA I don't know where Pat is

CHARLES [*to DIANA*] I wish you'd ask Margery to come here

DIANA All right I don't care if you are angry, I think you're terribly attractive

CHARLES Go to hell!

[*Picks up railway guide As DIANA is going out, JUDY enters*]

JUDY Did you call me, Daddy?

CHARLES Yes I'm just going to have a little chat with your mother I wish you'd go upstairs and see that Johnston is packing my things all right I put every thing I wanted on the bed

JUDY Right-ho!

CHARLES And when the bag is ready tell her to put it in the car

JUDY D'you want me to drive you down to the station?

CHARLES No, better let Simpson Where's Pat?

JUDY He's locked himself up in his room He's eating butterscotch He's sulking

CHARLES If butterscotch makes him sulk, why does he eat it?

JUDY He isn't sulking because he's eating butterscotch, he's sulking because you said he was a bore

CHARLES I didn't blame him for it I merely stated it as an interesting fact

JUDY You couldn't expect him to like it I didn't either I've been thinking it over Do you know, I've got rather a ghastly suspicion about you, Daddy?

CHARLES Oh, what is it?

[*Leaning back*]

JUDY Well, I've got a *ghastly suspicion* that perhaps you've got more sense of humor than we any of us quite realized

CHARLES I? Oh, my dear, what makes you think that?

JUDY I don't know It's made me rather uneasy I mean it would be comic if all this time you'd been laughing at us up your sleeve Isn't it funny, I like you better now that I've ever liked you before

CHARLES I don't know why

JUDY Well, I suppose the fact is that now you're doing the dirty on us you seem so much more human

CHARLES H'm You surprise me

JUDY You see, you don't know me, Daddy I suppose it's impossible for a father to know his daughter

CHARLES Do people ever know one another?

JUDY I think when they're in love they think they do

CHARLES And are never more mistaken

JUDY Were you in love with *Mummy* when you married her?

CHARLES Oh, yes, crazy about her

JUDY I suppose love can't be expected to last forever

CHARLES I suppose not I think that's the only real tragedy in life Death? Well, one expects death But when one's in love, one never expects love to *die* It makes life look such a sell

JUDY I wonder why it *doesn't last*?

CHARLES Habit kills it

JUDY Dinah and I have often discussed whether it wouldn't be better to have affairs than to marry

CHARLES There's not much in it An

affair is just as tiresome and more inconvenient

JUDY [*pause*] Pity you're going just now There are lots of things I should have liked to ask you

CHARLES Why have you never asked me before?

JUDY One can't talk to one's father It's only because I don't look upon you as my father any more that I can treat you as a human being Of course parents and children bore one another They never talk to us of the things that interest them, and we never talk to them of the things that matter to us

CHARLES If we ever meet again we must try to forget our unfortunate relationship You will be an engaging young lady, I've run across by chance, and I shall be an elderly gentleman in reduced circumstances who once knew your mother

JUDY I daresay we shall find we have quite a lot to say to one another

CHARLES For my part I should like to tell you that I shall be delighted to renew the acquaintance we've so unexpectedly made [*Rises Business of CHARLES kissing JUDY'S hand*] It's been charming to meet you

JUDY Daddy, why are you going away? It's for your soul's sake, isn't it?

CHARLES That sounds rather pretentious and highfalutin, doesn't it?

JUDY Does that matter? Just for once, and within these *four walls*

CHARLES Well, perhaps it is I have so few years before me It seems a pity to waste them Have you ever had an awful lot of letters to write and only ten minutes to catch the post? You don't write the most important ones from the standpoint of eternity, but only the important ones to you Perhaps they're quite trivial, making a date or answering an invitation, but they are all you have time for The others must go to the devil I only have time now to do what I urgently want to do

JUDY You've got your chance You'll be a fool not to take it I don't blame you In your place I'd do what you're doing

CHARLES You're a good girl, Judy

JUDY You've given me my chance too I never wanted to be a young lady Coming out and going to parties, getting married and going to parties [*Turns to him*] I want to go on the stage

CHARLES Are you prepared to work? It isn't just doing your bit in a play and

then going to supper at the Savoy It's a whole-time job

JUDY Oh, yes I'll work

CHARLES Well, be natural, that's the chief thing

JUDY That ought to be easy

CHARLES It isn't It's the result of infinite pains It's the final triumph of artifice And remember that society only looks upon you as a freak and, the moment you're out of fashion, drops you like a hot potato Society has killed more good actors than drink It's only your raw material Let the footlights, at least spiritually, always hold you aloof These are the last solemn words that a father whispers to his daughter's shell-like ear, as he is about to leave her forever

JUDY Why forever? When I'm a celebrated actress with a princely salary, and you are a broken-down old reprobate, I shall always be pleased to offer you a home in my palatial flat

CHARLES That's sweet of you

[MARGERY is seen through window]

JUDY Here's Mummy [Rises]

CHARLES Nip along, darling, and when my packing's finished, come and tell me

JUDY Right-ho Bless you, Daddy Have a good time! [They kiss]

CHARLES Same to you, my pet [She slips out through alcove MARGERY comes in from the garden CHARLES goes towards her and takes her hand] Come and sit down, Margery

MARGERY Is it true you're going away to-day?

CHARLES Yes

MARGERY You are deliberately breaking my heart

CHARLES My dear, for the first time in our lives we're going to have a serious talk It'll be so much easier if we say nothing that we don't mean

MARGERY You must expect me to be a little emotional I love you, Charles

CHARLES No, dear, that's not true If you still had for me that hungry craving of the soul they call love, I think it's possible I shouldn't have the courage to leave you You were in love with me once, just as I was in love with you, and one doesn't forget

MARGERY Naturally, I'm not the same as I was nineteen years ago It would be absurd if I were still the lovesick girl I was then

CHARLES And extremely tiresome

MARGERY Love isn't everything I mean, there's companionship and mutual

confidence and all that I've always had a great affection for you Why, I don't believe we've even had a squabble for ten years

CHARLES I wonder if it didn't make you a little uneasy? Doesn't it strike you that two people must be profoundly indifferent to one another if they never find occasion to disagree?

MARGERY I don't know how you can be so ungrateful Don't you realize that if we got on so well it was entirely due to my wonderful tact? Believe me, it wasn't always so easy You were very different when you came back from the war

CHARLES We were both very different Or perhaps we weren't different at all After five years we saw one another for the first time as we really were

MARGERY I don't know what you mean by that I'd developed a lot during the war Most people thought I was so much improved

CHARLES Out of all recognition, my dear We were strangers to one another We had to start making each other's acquaintance all over again from the beginning I don't think we liked one another very much

MARGERY I was a little disappointed in you I don't mind admitting it But fortunately I have imagination I remember how disgusted I was when once you dropped a piece of bread and butter on the ground and picked it up and ate it as though nothing had happened But I said, that's the war, and I made allowances

CHARLES It's very difficult for two people who are not in love with one another to live together It's funny what trivial things get on their nerves

MARGERY It wasn't trivial at all It was deeply significant of the change that had taken place in you You'd lost all your beautiful idealism Why, you weren't even patriotic any more You drank too much, and your language was filthy

CHARLES I suppose my nerves were a bit groggy You were very patient with me

MARGERY I made up my mind that I must be When the Armistice came, the war was over for you, but I had to go on doing my bit just the same And there were thousands of women in England like me I've been a good and faithful wife to you

CHARLES Perhaps we've both been too good and faithful You know, of course, that the Tasmanians, who never committed adultery, are now extinct

MARGERY No, I don't And I'm not interested in the Tasmanians I think it's frightfully callous of you to mention them when I'm so upset

CHARLES You mustn't think I'm not sorry to cause you annoyance

MARGERY Did you say annoyance?

CHARLES I did I think your vanity is hurt by my leaving you I don't believe your heart is much concerned

MARGERY What's the good of my telling you I love you if you don't believe a word I say?

CHARLES I shall believe you if you tell the truth

MARGERY How can I tell the truth when I'm taken by surprise like this? The whole thing has come as such a shock to me It never occurred to me that you weren't absolutely satisfied I always looked upon ours as an ideal marriage I don't know what more you wanted

CHARLES Like Queen Victoria, I was not amused [Sitting back]

MARGERY You can't expect marriage to be amusing If it were, the law wouldn't protect it, and the Church wouldn't sanctify it Do you think women find marriage amusing? They've been bored stiff by it for a thousand generations Half the women I know are so bored by their husbands that they could scream at the sight of them

CHARLES Why do they stick it?

MARGERY Because everybody else sticks it Because marriage is like that They get used to it Because it always has been and always will be their only respectable means of livelihood And because of the children What do you think is going to happen to Judy and Pat now?

CHARLES They're sturdy young things They can work

MARGERY Nonsense You can't bring children into the world and then abandon them just when they need you most I mean, that's not what we fought the Germans for

CHARLES Do you really think that I'm called upon to go on working indefinitely in order to provide my wife and children not with the necessities of existence, but with luxuries they can very well do without?

MARGERY It's what one naturally expects a man to do After all, it's no hardship to work I mean, that's what I've always impressed on the children "You can't be happy unless you work Look at me," I say to them, "I'm busy all day long"

CHARLES Isn't it awful, the humbug we instil into young minds? How absurd it is to pretend that there's any value in work in itself Work is only a nuisance—at all events, the work that the great majority of us are obliged to do—its only real use is to give us leisure

MARGERY I'm the last person to deny the value of leisure Only you can't appreciate it unless you've earned it I mean, there's so much beauty in doing your duty in that state of life in which a merciful providence has been pleased to place you And, after all, beauty is the thing that counts There's beauty in the commonplace round of every day

CHARLES You're a remarkable woman, Margery

MARGERY No, I'm not, but I'm not a fool, and no one has ever called me a prig I daresay I've thought about these things a little more deeply than you have I'm an idealist I think it's so ugly to be selfish It's in self-sacrifice that a man fulfils himself It's in giving all he has to those who are near and dear to him that he solves the riddle of life and makes out of his poor little existence a thing of beauty

CHARLES [pauses and chuckles] Margery, you're priceless!

[JUDY comes down L C]

JUDY Daddy!

MARGERY Run along, darling Your father and I are talking

JUDY I only came to say that everything was packed, Daddy Johnston is putting your bag in the car

CHARLES Oh, good Then nothing remains but for me to say good-bye

[Rises]

MARGERY [rises] But you're not going now?

CHARLES Yes

MARGERY But you can't I haven't said half the things I wanted to say I haven't begun yet I know I could get you to stop if I could only think of the right things to say

CHARLES My dear, you'd never think of the right things to say, because in your heart you don't want me to stay I shouldn't go with such a kindly feeling toward you if I didn't feel that there's somewhere stirring in you the thrill of a new adventure

MARGERY It's no good crying over spilt milk, is it?

CHARLES Good-bye, Margery

[*He kisses her on the cheek She gives it to him listlessly, as she has done for years*]

MARGERY It seems so strange your going like this I simply don't know what to make of it

JUDY Johnston said you didn't want your tails, but I told her to pack them

CHARLES Oh, why? They'll be quite useless to me

JUDY You never know You might want to be a waiter

CHARLES Thoughtful child That had never occurred to me

MARGERY Charlie! you can't be a waiter

CHARLES I have in point of fact a particular fancy to be a commercial traveler

MARGERY Oh, Charlie, how *infra dag*

JUDY What will you travel in, Daddy?

CHARLES Romance

MARGERY How impractical

JUDY But what fun

CHARLES Good-bye, Judy

JUDY Good-bye, darling Bless you!

[*He pushes her down to her mother He*

kisses her and goes out quickly Door slams]

MARGERY Judy, where is Tasmania?

THE END

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The Weakling, Carl Sternheim

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You Never Can Tell, Bernard Shaw

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

(1902)

BY

SIR JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE

CHARACTERS

THE HON. ERNEST WOOLLEY

CRICHTON

LADY CATHERINE

LADY AGATHA

LADY MARY

TREHERNE

LORD BROCKLEHURST

THE EARL OF LOAM

FISHER

TWEENY

Other servants at Loam House

Naval Officer

LADY BROCKLEHURST

ACT I Loam House, Mayfair, London

ACT II A desert isle in the Pacific Two months later

ACT III Same as Act II Two years later

ACT IV Loam House, London Several months later

TIME—About 1900

SIR JAMES BARRIE

THE three playwrights largely responsible in the 1890's for the renaissance of the English drama were Jones, Pinero, and Wilde. Jones and Pinero enlarged the subject matter of drama to include themes of social import, and demonstrated that the methods and aims of the new realism could be successfully applied to dramatic literature. Wilde contributed brilliant wit and literate dialogue. Three greater dramatists, all first-rate men of letters, however, were destined to assume leadership in the new movement—Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, and James Matthew Barrie. Not since the days of Congreve had England's foremost writers devoted their talents successfully to the stage. Shaw invented a vigorous and provocative drama of disquisition, Galsworthy wrote disturbing plays about the problems of modern man in the complexities of contemporary society, Barrie in plays definitely "modern" combined romance, fancy, and realism to illuminate human character and behavior.

Sir James Barrie, the most beloved of modern British playwrights, was born in the humble cottage of a family of Scottish weavers in 1860. He was educated (as they say) at Dumfries Academy and the University of Edinburgh. After an apprenticeship in journalism in Nottingham, he slipped into London, first contributing sketches of Scottish life to various periodicals, then turning to fiction and achieving renown with *The Little Minister* (1891) and *Sentimental Tommy* (1896). After composing a half dozen insignificant plays, he had a popular success when he dramatized *The Little Minister* (1897). Although *Quality Street* and *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), *Peter Pan* (1904), *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), *Dear Brutus* (1917), *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* (1918), and *Mary Rose* (1920) brought him fame and wealth unsurpassed by any other modern writer, Barrie remained shy and retiring and became an almost legendary figure. In his last years, however, he emerged from his shell, and was much sought after for public addresses and after-dinner speeches. He died in London in 1937, saddened by the failure of his last play, *The Boy David*.

At least ten of his plays have a secure place in dramatic literature. *Quality Street* is a quaint and sentimental period piece with an absurdly improbable plot, but with continued flashes of sunny comedy. *Peter Pan* is the greatest of modern fantasies, a fairy play that no child and few adults fail to understand and respond to. *Peter Pan* has had a London production at Christmas every year (war or no war) since 1904. Its admirers predict that it will outlive every other modern play. St. John Ervine has told many times of an illuminating experience during a matinee performance of *Peter Pan*. Directly in front of him sat an Indian boy and an English boy. When the appeal to believe in fairies was made, the Indian, very cool and self-possessed, turned to the English boy and asked, "Do you believe in fairies?" The latter, taut and intense, could scarcely speak. "Yes," he whispered passionately. "So do I," the Indian boy answered calmly. The genius Barrie proved that at least for a moment the East and West *did* meet that December afternoon in London. *Alce-Sit-by-the-Fire* (1905) is a near farce in which Barrie pokes fun at the sentimental drama and dismal problem play. In *What Every Woman Knows* (1908) Barrie is doubly bold: he uses the tritest of themes (the triangle theme of the canny, prosy wife, the lovely siren, and the erring husband) and with success, and deliberately with a scratch of the pen he makes his heroine homely instead of beautiful, but convinces us that she has charm. *The Will* (1913)

is a surprise—a brief, concentrated tragedy, hopelessly pessimistic, deeply moving and unforgettable *Dear Brutus* (1917) illustrates the complexities of Barrie's genius, for it is at once sentimental and satirical, realistic and supernatural, and in spite of the humor and fantasy, it is disillusioned and almost cynical in its underlying theme *Mary Rose* (1920) is an exciting dramatization of an old legend of the Hebrides, distressing to those who seek hidden meanings, but thrilling if accepted on its own terms—merely as a good yarn Barrie's expert craftsmanship is apparent in his one-act plays *The Twelve Pound Look* (1910) deserves its reputation as a perfect brief play Only those who saw performances of *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* and *A Well-Remembered Voice* during the dark days of the first World War can appreciate fully their great power and simple beauty *Shall We Join the Ladies?* (1922) is an ingenious "first act of an unfinished play" which tantalizes and spoofs the audience

Because of the post-war disillusion and bitterness and the growth in popularity of the realistic and naturalistic method in literature there has been a temporary decline in Barrie's reputation, moreover, men of genius seldom please the generation immediately following theirs To such critics as George Jean Nathan (who tolerates the sentimental only in Eugene O'Neill and Sean O'Casey) Barrie is a mawkish and childish escapist Barrie's admirers cannot entirely explain away the "whimsical" and "elusive," even though the dramatist himself protested that he was not whimsical but realistic There are treacly passages in *4 Kiss for Cinderella* and the preface to *Peter Pan*, for example, that are exasperatingly namby-pamby Perhaps his mother-complex hampered him somewhat as a creative artist, although his deep understanding of his mother as well as his great love for her is partly responsible for the sharp portraits of Maggie, Leonora, and other heroines It is significant that Barrie praised Thornton Wilder's novels extravagantly On the other hand there is much to justify Barrie's contention that he is realistic His drama is far more than the old *comédie larmoyante* plus a superficial realism There is a vein of iron running through his best plays however much lavender and old lace on the surface One can safely dispose of all such quibbling by admitting Barrie to the small, select group of geniuses, who defy classification and generalization He is not only a dramatic genius, as expert a play-maker as Ibsen, Sardou, or Pinero, he is also a skillful playwright who knows the value of surprise and suspense and who does not hesitate to submit his stories to the discipline of the well-made play He has given to our language the adjective "Barriesque," which is immediately understood by his readers and audiences, but which is not to be satisfactorily defined, for there is no synonym

Max Beerbohm began his criticism in *The Saturday Review* of the first performance of *The Admirable Crichton* with unqualified praise "I think *The Admirable Crichton* is quite the best thing that has happened, in my time, to the British stage," and admirers of Barrie assert that nothing has happened to the British stage in the past forty years to nullify that judgment Unlike Barrie's other plays it presents a serious problem—a grave attack on the existing social order It deals with the very structure of society and demands a re-defining of the term "democracy" For all the serious import of the play, its bitter irony, its near-tragic conclusion, it sparkles with comedy and constantly swerves into farce and burlesque *The Admirable Crichton* is a fable, a parable, and like all fables and parables it must not be judged as realism Silly Lord Loam is a figure of burlesque, not of the House of Lords, the servants belong to Dickens's, not Galsworthy's Mayfair, the plausibility or implausibility of detail in Act II is of no importance, the love story of Lady Mary and Crichton is incidental Towering above all these details is the tremendous theme of the play, the meaning of the parable Sentimentalists have objected to the ending, believing that Crichton never could descend again to such servility (Did not a saddle-maker become the

first president of the German republic, and a Scottish cottager and a Welsh miner Prime Ministers of England?), but a romantic ending would destroy the meaning of the parable and the satire. Barrie wrote the last act first to be sure of getting it "right." William Lyon Phelps makes the interesting suggestion that the play is a tragedy, not only for Crichton, but also for Lord Loam and possibly others when the "change from open air, exercise, ample food, to their opposites, brings on some horrible disease of the liver."

Barrie was the last important modern dramatist to consent to the publishing of his plays. To prepare reading editions, he spent months on each play preparing his famous stage directions—transmuting a bare scenario into literature. Readers should note in the directions the sly humor and satire, the elaborate information often useless to actor and director but entertaining and valuable for the reader. On the stage the most dramatic moments in *The Admirable Crichton* are the wordless endings of Act II and the boom of the gun in Act III, how successfully is the tenseness suggested in the text? In the cinema version (with the pious Biblical title *Male and Female*—characteristic of Hollywood) upon their return to England Lady Mary is persuaded by a friend not to marry Crichton when a horrible example of similar mismating is dangled before her. Comment is unnecessary. What can be said for the suggestion that the fourth act be omitted? Are the characters and situation so peculiarly British that the play lacks universal significance? Keeping in mind the theme of *The Admirable Crichton*, how would you answer Aristotle's contention that slavery is justified on the ground that a certain proportion of men are born with servile manners?

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON

ACT I

moment before the curtain rises, the HON ERNEST WOOLLEY drives up to the door of Loam House in Mayfair. There is a happy smile on his pleasant, insignificant face, and this presumably means that he is thinking of himself. He is too busy over nothing, this man about town, to be always thinking of himself, but, on the other hand, he almost never thinks of any other person. Probably ERNEST'S great moment is when he wakes of a morning and realizes that he really is ERNEST, for we must all wish to be that which is our ideal. We can conceive of him springing out of bed lightly and waiting for his man to do the rest. He is dressed in excellent taste, with just the little bit more which shows that he is not without a sense of humor. The dandiacal are often saved by carrying a smile at the whole thing in their spats, let us say. ERNEST left Cambridge the other day, a member of the Athenaeum (which he would be sorry to have you confound with a club in London by the same name). He is a bachelor, but not of the arts, no mean epigrammatist (as you shall see), and a favorite of the ladies. He is almost a celebrity in restaurants, where he dines frequently, returning to sup, and during this last year he has probably paid as much in them for the privilege of handing his hat to an attendant as the rent of a working-man's flat. He complains brightly that he is hard up, and that if somebody or other at Westminster does not look out the country will go to the dogs. He is no fool. He has the shrewdness to float with the current because it is a labor-saving process, but he has sufficient pluck to fight, if fight he must (a brief contest, for he would soon be toppled over). He has a light nature, which would enable him to bob up cheerily in new conditions and return unaltered to the old ones. His selfishness is his most endearing quality. If he has his way he will spend his life like a cat in pushing his betters

out of the soft places, and until he is old he will be fondled in the process. He gives his hat to one footman and his cane to another, and mounts the great staircase unassisted and undirected. As a nephew of the house he need show no credentials even to CRICHTON, who is guarding a door above. It would not be good taste to describe CRICHTON, who is only a servant, if to the scandal of all good houses he is to stand out as a figure in the play, he must do it on his own, as they say in the pantry and the boudoir. We are not going to help him. We have had misgivings ever since we found his name in the title, and we shall keep him out of his rights as long as we can. Even though we softened to him he would not be a hero in these clothes of servitude, and he loves his clothes. How to get him out of them? It would require a cataclysm. To be an indoor servant at all is to CRICHTON a badge of honor, to be a butler at thirty is the realization of his proudest ambitions. He is devotedly attached to his master, who, in his opinion, has but one fault, he is not sufficiently contemptuous of his inferiors. We are immediately to be introduced to this solitary failing of a great English peer. This perfect butler, then, opens a door, and ushers ERNEST into a certain room. At the same moment the curtain rises on this room, and the play begins. It is one of several reception-rooms in Loam House, not the most magnificent but quite the softest, and of a warm afternoon all that those who are anybody crave for is the softest. The larger rooms are magnificent and bare, carpetless, so that it is an accomplishment to keep one's feet on them, they are sometimes lent for charitable purposes, they are also all in use on the night of a dinner party, when you may find yourself alone in one, having taken a wrong turning, or alone, save for two others who are within hailing distance. This room, however, is comparatively small and very soft. There

are so many cushions in it that you wonder why, if you are an outsider and don't know that it needs six cushions to make one fair head comfy. The couches themselves are cushions as large as beds, and there is an art of sinking into them and of waiting to be helped out of them. There are several famous paintings on the walls, of which you may say, "Jolly thing that," without losing caste as knowing too much, and in cases there are glorious miniatures, but the daughters of the house cannot tell you of whom, "there is a catalogue somewhere." There are a thousand or so of roses in basins, several library novels, and a row of weekly illustrated newspapers lying against each other like fallen soldiers. If any one disturbs this row CRICHTON seems to know of it from afar and appears noiselessly and replaces the wanderer. One thing unexpected in such a room is a great array of tea things. ERNEST spots them with a twinkle and has his epigram at once unsheathed. He dallies, however, before delivering the thrust.

ERNEST I perceive, from the tea cups, Crichton, that the great function is to take place here.

CRICHTON [*with a respectful sigh*]

Yes, sir.

ERNEST [*chuckling heartlessly*] The servants' hall coming up to have tea in the drawing-room! [*With terrible sarcasm*] No wonder you look happy, Crichton.

CRICHTON [*under the knife*] No, sir. ERNEST Do you know, Crichton, I think that with an effort you might look even happier. [*CRICHTON smiles wanly*] You don't approve of his lordship's compelling his servants to be his equals—once a month?

CRICHTON It is not for me, sir, to disapprove of his lordship's Radical views.

ERNEST Certainly not. And, after all, it is only once a month that he is affable to you.

CRICHTON On all other days of the month, sir, his lordship's treatment of us is everything that could be desired.

ERNEST [*this is the epigram*] Tea cups! Life, Crichton, is like a cup of tea, the more heartily we drink, the sooner we reach the dregs.

CRICHTON [*obediently*] Thank you, sir.

ERNEST [*becoming confidential, as we do when we have need of an ally*] Crich-

ton, in case I should be asked to say a few words to the servants, I have strung together a little speech [*His hand strays to his pocket*] I was wondering where I should stand.

[*He tries various places and postures, and comes to rest leaning over a high chair, whence, in dumb show he addresses a gathering CRICHTON, with the best intentions, gives him a footstool to stand on, and departs, happily unconscious that ERNEST in some dudgeon has kicked the footstool across the room*].

ERNEST [*addressing an imaginary audience, and desirous of startling them at once*] Suppose you were all little fishes at the bottom of the sea—

[*He is not quite satisfied with his position, though sure that the fault must lie with the chair for being too high, not with him for being too short. CRICHTON'S suggestion was not perhaps a bad one after all. He lifts the stool, but hastily conceals it behind him on the entrance of the LADIES CATHERINE and AGATHA, two daughters of the house. CATHERINE is twenty, and AGATHA is two years younger. They are very fashionable young women indeed, who might wake up for a dance, but they are very lazy, CATHERINE being two years lazier than AGATHA*].

ERNEST [*uneasily jocular, because he is concealing the footstool*] And how are my little friends today?

AGATHA [*contriving to reach a settee*] Don't be silly, Ernest. If you want to know how we are, we are dead. Even to think of entertaining the servants is so exhausting.

CATHERINE [*subsiding nearer the door*] Besides which, we have had to decide what frocks to take with us on the yacht, and that is such a mental strain.

ERNEST You poor over-worked things [*Evidently AGATHA is his favorite, for he helps her to put her feet on the settee, while CATHERINE has to dispose of her own feet*]. Rest your weary limbs.

CATHERINE [*perhaps in revenge*] But why have you a footstool in your hand?

AGATHA Yes?

ERNEST Why? [*Brilliantly, but to be sure he has had time to think it out*] You see, as the servants are to be the guests I must be butler. I was practising. This is a tray observe [*Holding the footstool as a tray, he minces across the room like an accomplished footman. The gods favor him for just here LADY MARY enters and he*

holds out the footstool to her] Tea, my lady?

[LADY MARY is a beautiful creature of twenty two, and is of a natural hauteur which is at once the fury and the envy of her sisters. If she chooses she can make you seem so insignificant that you feel you might be swept away with the crumb brush. She seldom chooses, because of the trouble of preening herself as she does it, she is usually content to show that you merely tire her eyes. She often seems to be about to go to sleep in the middle of a remark there is quite a long and anxious pause, and then she continues, like a clock that hesitates, bored in the middle of its strike.]

LADY MARY [arching her brows] It is only you, Ernest, I thought there was some one here

[And she also bestows herself on cushions]

ERNEST [a little piqued, and deserting the footstool] Had a very tiring day also, Mary?

LADY MARY [yawning] Dreadfully. Been trying on engagement-rings all the morning

ERNEST [who is as fond of gossip as the oldest club member] What's that? [To AGATHA] Is it Brocklehurst? [The energetic AGATHA nods] You have given your warm young heart to Brocky? [LADY MARY is impervious to his humor, but he continues bravely] I don't wish to fatigue you, Mary, by insisting on a verbal answer, but if, without straining yourself, you can signify Yes or No, won't you make the effort? [She indolently flashes a ring on her most important finger, and he starts back melodramatically] The ring! Then I am too late, too late! [Fixing LADY MARY sternly, like a prosecuting counsel] May I ask, Mary, does Brocky know? Of course it was that terrible mother of his who pulled this through. Mother does everything for Brocky. Still, in the eyes of the law you will be, not her wife, but his, and, therefore, I hold that Brocky ought to be informed. Now — [He discovers that their languorous eyes have closed] If you girls are shamming sleep in the expectation that I shall awaken you in the manner beloved of ladies, abandon all such hopes

[CATHERINE and AGATHA look up without speaking]

LADY MARY [speaking without looking up] You impertinent boy

ERNEST [eagerly plucking another epigram from his quiver] I knew that was it,

though I don't know everything. Agatha, I'm not young enough to know everything

[He looks hopefully from one to another but though they try to grasp this, his brilliance baffles them]

AGATHA [his secret admirer] Young enough?

ERNEST [encouragingly] Don't you see? I'm not young enough to know everything

AGATHA I'm sure it's awfully clever, but it's so puzzling

[Here CRICHTON ushers in an athletic, pleasant faced young clergyman, MR TREHERNE, who greets the company]

CATHERINE Ernest, say it to Mr Treherne

ERNEST Look here, Treherne, I'm not young enough to know everything

TREHERNE How do you mean, Ernest?

ERNEST [a little nettled] I mean what I say

LADY MARY Say it again, say it more slowly

ERNEST I'm—not—young—enough—to—know—everything

TREHERNE I see. What you really mean, my boy, is that you are not old enough to know everything

ERNEST No, I don't

TREHERNE I assure you that's it

LADY MARY Of course it is

CATHERINE Yes, Ernest, that's it

[ERNEST, in desperation, appeals to CRICHTON]

ERNEST I am not young enough, Crichton, to know everything

[It is an anxious moment, but a smile is at length extorted from CRICHTON as with a corkscrew]

CRICHTON Thank you, sir [He goes]

ERNEST [relieved] Ah, if you had that fellow's head, Treherne, you would find something better to do with it than play cricket. I hear you bowl with your head

TREHERNE [with proper humility] I'm afraid cricket is all I'm good for, Ernest

CATHERINE [who thinks he has a heavenly nose] Indeed, it isn't. You are sure to get on, Mr Treherne

TREHERNE Thank you, Lady Catherine

CATHERINE But it was the bishop who told me so. He said a clergyman who breaks both ways is sure to get on in England

TREHERNE I'm jolly glad

[The master of the house comes in and

accompanied by LORD BROCKLEHURST The EARL OF LOAM is a widower, a philanthropist, and a peer of advanced ideas As a widower he is at least able to interfere in the domestic concerns of his house—to rummage in the drawers, so to speak, for which he has felt an itching all his blameless life, his philanthropy has opened quite a number of other drawers to him, and his advanced ideas have blown out his figure He takes in all the weightiest monthly reviews, and prefers those that are uncut, because he perhaps never looks better than when cutting them, but he does not read them, and save for the cutting, it would suit him as well merely to take in the covers He writes letters to the papers, which are printed in a type to scale with himself, and he is very jealous of those other correspondents who get his type Let laws and learning, art and commerce die, but leave the big type to an intellectual aristocracy He is really the reformed House of Lords which will come some day

[Young LORD BROCKLEHURST is nothing, save for his rank You could pick him up by the handful any day in Piccadilly or Holborn, buying socks—or selling them]

LORD LOAM [expansively] You are here, Ernest Feeling fit for the voyage, Treherne?

TREHERNE Looking forward to it enormously

LORD LOAM That's right [He chases his children about as if they were chickens] Now then, Mary, up and doing, up and doing Time we had the servants in They enjoy it so much

LADY MARY They hate it

LORD LOAM Mary, to your duties [And he points severely to the tea-table]

ERNEST [twinkling] Congratulations, Brocky

LORD BROCKLEHURST [Who detests humour] Thanks

ERNEST Mother pleased?

LORD BROCKLEHURST [with dignity] Mother is very pleased

ERNEST That's good Do you go on the yacht with us?

LORD BROCKLEHURST Sorry I can't And look here, Ernest, I will not be called Brocky

ERNEST Mother don't like it?

LORD BROCKLEHURST She does not

[He leaves ERNEST who forgives him

and begins to think about his speech CRICHTON enters]

LORD LOAM [speaking as one man to another] We are quite ready, Crichton

[CRICHTON is distressed]

LADY MARY [sarcastically] How Crichton enjoys it!

LORD LOAM [frowning] He is the only one who doesn't, pitiful creature

CRICHTON [shuddering under his lord's displeasure] I can't help being a Conservative, my lord

LORD LOAM Be a man, Crichton You are the same flesh and blood as myself

CRICHTON [in pain] Oh, my lord!

LORD LOAM [sharply] Show them in, and, by the way, they were not all here last time

CRICHTON All, my lord, except the merest trifles

LORD LOAM It must be every one [Lowering] And remember this, Crichton, for the time being you are my equal [Testily] I shall soon show you whether you are not my equal Do as you are told [CRICHTON departs to obey, and his lordship is now a general He has no pity for his daughters, and uses a terrible threat] And girls, remember, no condescension The first who condescends recites [Thus sends them scurrying to their labors] By the way, Brocklehurst, can you do anything?

LORD BROCKLEHURST How do you mean?

LORD LOAM Can you do anything—with a penny or a handkerchief, make them disappear, for instance?

LORD BROCKLEHURST Good heavens, no

LORD LOAM It's a pity Every one in our position ought to be able to do something Ernest, I shall probably ask you to say a few words, something bright and sparkling

ERNEST But, my dear uncle, I have prepared nothing

LORD LOAM Anything impromptu will do

ERNEST Oh—well—if anything strikes me on the spur of the moment

[He unostentatiously gets the footstool into position behind the chair CRICHTON reappears to announce the guests, of whom the first is the housekeeper]

CRICHTON [reluctantly] Mrs Perkins

LORD LOAM [shaking hands] Very delighted, Mrs Perkins Mary our friend, Mrs Perkins

LADY MARY How do you do, Mrs Perkins? Won't you sit here?

LORD LOAM [*threateningly*] Agatha!
AGATHA [*hastily*] How do you do?
Won't you sit down?

LORD LOAM [*introducing*] Lord
Brocklehurst—my valued friend Mrs Per-
kins

[*LORD BROCKLEHURST bows and
escapes. He has to fall back on
ERNEST*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST For heaven's
sake, Ernest, don't leave me for a moment,
this sort of thing is utterly opposed to all
my principles

ERNEST [*airily*] You stick to me,
Brocky, and I'll pull you through

CRICHTON Monsieur Fleury

ERNEST The chef

LORD LOAM [*shaking hands with the
chef*] Very charmed to see you, Monsieur
Fleury

FLEURY Thank you very much

[*FLEURY bows to AGATHA, who is
not effusive*]

LORD LOAM [*warningly*] Agatha—
recitation!

[*She tosses her head, but immediately
finds a seat and tea for M FLEURY
TREHERNE and ERNEST move
about, making themselves amiable
LADY MARY is presiding at the tea-
tray*]

CRICHTON Mr Rolleston

LORD LOAM [*shaking hands with his
valet*] How do you do, Rolleston?

[*CATHERINE looks after the wants of
ROLLESTON*]

CRICHTON Mr Tompsett

[*TOMPSETT, the coachman, is received
with honors, from which he shrinks*]

CRICHTON Miss Fisher

[*This superb creature is no less than
LADY MARY'S maid, and even LORD
LOAM is a little nervous*]

LORD LOAM This is a pleasure, Miss
Fisher

ERNEST [*unabashed*] If I might ven-
ture, Miss Fisher

[*And he takes her unto himself*]

CRICHTON Miss Simmons

LORD LOAM [*to CATHERINE'S
maid*] You are always welcome, Miss Sim-
mons

ERNEST [*perhaps to kindle jealousy in
MISS FISHER*] At last we meet Won't
you sit down?

CRICHTON Mademoiselle Jeanne

LORD LOAM Charmed to see you,
Mademoiselle Jeanne

[*A place is found for AGATHA'S maid,
and the scene is now an animated one,
but still our host thinks his girls are not*

*sufficiently sociable. He frowns on
LADY MARY*]

LADY MARY [*in alarm*] Mr Treherne,
this is Fisher, my maid

LORD LOAM [*sharply*] Your what,
Mary?

LADY MARY My friend

CRICHTON Thomas

LORD LOAM How do you do, Thomas?

[*The first footman gives him a reluctant
hand*]

CRICHTON John

LORD LOAM How do you do, John?

[*ERNEST signs to LORD BROCKLE-
HURST, who hastens to him*]

ERNEST [*introducing*] Brocklehurst,
this is John I think you have already met
on the door-step

CRICHTON Jane

[*She comes, wrapping her hands miser-
ably in her apron*]

LORD LOAM [*doggedly*] Give me your
hand, Jane

CRICHTON Gladys

ERNEST How do you do, Gladys You
know my uncle?

LORD LOAM Your hand, Gladys

[*He bestows her on AGATHA*]

CRICHTON Tweeny

[*She is a very humble and frightened
kitchen-maid, of whom we are to see
more*]

LORD LOAM So happy to see you

FISHER John, I saw you talking to
Lord Brocklehurst just now, introduce me

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*at the same
moment to ERNEST*] That's an uncom-
mon pretty girl, if I must feed one of them
Ernest, that's the one

[*But ERNEST tries to part him and
FISHER as they are about to shake
hands*]

ERNEST No you don't, it won't do,
Brocky [*To MISS FISHER*] You are too
pretty, my dear Mother wouldn't like it
[*Discovering TWEENY*] Here's some-
thing safer Charming girl, Brocky, dying
to know you, let me introduce you
Tweeny, Lord Brocklehurst—Lord Brockle-
hurst, Tweeny

[*BROCKLEHURST accepts his fate, but
he still has an eye for FISHER, and
something may come of this*]

LORD LOAM [*severely*] They are not
all here, Crichton

CRICHTON [*with a sigh*] Odds and
ends

[*A STABLE-BOY and a PAGE are
shown in, and for a moment no daugh-
ter of the house advances to them*]

LORD LOAM [*with a roving eye on his children*] Which is to recite?

[*The last of the company are, so to say, embraced*]

LORD LOAM [*to TOMPSETT, as they partake of tea together*] And how are all at home?

TOMPSETT Fairch, my lord, if 'tis the horses you are inquiring 'or?

LORD LOAM No, no, the family How's the baby?

TOMPSETT Blooming, your lordship

LORD LOAM A very fine boy I remember saying so when I saw him, nice little fellow

TOMPSETT [*not quite knowing whether to let it pass*] Beg pardon, my lord it's a girl

LORD LOAM A girl? Aha! ha! ha! exactly what I said I distinctly remember saying, If it's spared it will be a girl

[*CRICHTON now comes down*]

LORD LOAM Very delighted to see you, Crichton [*CRICHTON has to shake hands*] Mary, you know Mr Crichton?

[*He wanders off in search of other prey*]

LADY MARY Milk and sugar, Crichton?

CRICHTON I'm ashamed to be seen talking to you, my lady

LADY MARY To such a perfect servant as you all this must be most distasteful [*CRICHTON is too respectful to answer*] Oh, please do speak, or I shall have to recite You do hate it, don't you?

CRICHTON It pains me, your ladyship It disturbs the etiquette of the servants' hall After last month's meeting the page-boy, in a burst of equality, called me Crichton He was dismissed

LADY MARY I wonder—I really do—how you can remain with us

CRICHTON I should have felt compelled to give notice, my lady, if the master had not had a seat in the Upper House I clung to that

LADY MARY Do go on speaking Tell me, what did Mr Ernest mean by saying that he was not young enough to know everything?

CRICHTON I have no idea, my lady

LADY MARY But you laughed

CRICHTON My lady, he is the second son of a peer

LADY MARY Very proper sentiments You are a good soul, Crichton

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*desperately to TWEENY*] And now tell me, have you been to the Opera? What sort of weather have you been having in the kitchen?

[*TWEENY giggles*] For heaven's sake, woman, be articulate

CRICHTON [*still talking to LADY MARY*] No, my lady, his lordship may compel us to be equal upstairs, but there will never be equality in the servants' hall

LORD LOAM [*overhearing this*] What's that? No equality? Can't you see, Crichton, that our divisions into classes are artificial, that if we were to return to Nature, which is the aspiration of my life, all would be equal?

CRICHTON If I may make so bold as to contradict your lordship—

LORD LOAM [*with an effort*] Go on

CRICHTON The divisions into classes, my lord, are not artificial They are the natural outcome of a civilized society [*To LADY MARY*] There must always be a master and servants in all civilized communities, my lady, for it is natural, and whatever is natural is right

LORD LOAM [*wincing*] It is very unnatural for me to stand here and allow you to talk such nonsense

CRICHTON [*eagerly*] Yes, my lord, it is That is what I have been striving to point out to your lordship

AGATHA [*to CATHERINE*] What is the matter with Fisher? She is looking daggers

CATHERINE The tedious creature, some question of etiquette, I suppose [*She sails across to FISHER*] How are you, Fisher?

FISHER [*with a toss of her head*] I am nothing, my lady, I am nothing at all

AGATHA Oh dear, who says so?

FISHER [*affronted*] His lordship has asked that kitchen wench to have a second cup of tea

CATHERINE But why not?

FISHER If it pleases his lordship to offer it to her before offering it to me—

AGATHA So that is it Do you want another cup of tea, Fisher?

FISHER No, my lady—but my position—I should have been asked first

AGATHA Oh dear

[*All this has taken some time, and by now the feeble appetites of the uncomfortable guests have been satiated But they know there is still another ordeal to face—his lordship's monthly speech Every one awaits it with misgiving—the servants lest they should applaud, as last time, in the wrong place, and the daughters because he may be personal about them, as the time before ERNEST is annoyed that there should be this speech at all when there is such*]

a much better one coming, and BROCKLEHURST foresees the degradation of the peerage All are thinking of themselves alone save CRICHTON, who knows his master's weakness, and fears he may sick in the middle LORD LOAM, however, advances cheerfully to his doom He sees ERNEST'S stool, and artfully stands on it, to his nephew's natural indignation The three ladies knit their lips, the servants look down their noses, and the address begins]

LORD LOAM My friends, I am glad to see you all looking so happy It used to be predicted by the scoffer that these meetings would prove distasteful to you Are they distasteful? I hear you laughing at the question [*He has not heard them, but he hears them now, the watchful CRICHTON giving them a lead*] No harm in saying that among us today is one who was formerly hostile to the movement, but who today has been won over I refer to Lord Brocklehurst, who, I am sure, will presently say to me that if the charming lady now by his side has derived as much pleasure from his company as he has derived from hers, he will be more than satisfied [*All look at TWEEENY, who trembles*] For the time being the artificial and unnatural—I say unnatural [*glaring at CRICHTON, who bows slightly*—barriers of society are swept away Would that they could be swept away for ever [*The PAGEBOY cheers, and has the one moment of prominence in his life He grows up, marries and has children, but is never really heard of again*] But that is entirely and utterly out of the question And now for a few months we are to be separated As you know, my daughters and Mr Ernest and Mr Treherne are to accompany me on my yacht, on a voyage to distant parts of the earth In less than forty-eight hours we shall be under weigh [*But for CRICHTON'S eye the reckless PAGEBOY would repeat his success*] Do not think our life on the yacht is to be one long idle holiday My views on the excessive luxury of the day are well known, and what I preach I am resolved to practise I have therefore decided that my daughters, instead of having one maid each as at present, shall on this voyage have but one maid between them

[*Three maids rise, also three mistresses*]

CRICHTON My lord!

LORD LOAM My mind is made up

ERNEST I cordially agree

LORD LOAM And now, my friends, I should like to think that there is some piece

of advice I might give you, some thought, some noble saying over which you might ponder in my absence In this connection I remember a proverb, which has had a great effect on my own life I first heard it many years ago I have never forgotten it It constantly cheers and guides me That proverb is—that proverb was—the proverb I speak of—

[*He grows pale and taps his forehead*]

LADY MARY Oh dear, I believe he has forgotten it

LORD LOAM [*desperately*] The proverb—that proverb to which I refer—
[*Alas, it has gone The distress is general He has not even the sense to sit down He gropes for the proverb in the air They try applause, but it is no help*] I have it now—[*not he*]

LADY MARY [*with confidence*] Crichton

[*He does not fail her As quietly as if he were in goloshes, mind as well as feet, he dismisses the domestics, they go according to precedence as they entered, yet, in a moment, they are gone Then he signs to MR TREHERNE and then they conduct LORD LOAM with dignity from the room His hands are still catching flies, he still mutters, "The proverb—that proverb", but he continues, owing to CRICHTON'S skilful treatment, to look every inch a peer The ladies have now an opportunity to air their indignation]*

LADY MARY One maid among three grown women!

LORD BROCKLEHURST Mary, I think I had better go That dreadful kitchenmaid—

LADY MARY I can't blame you George [*He salutes her*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST Your father's views are shocking to me, and I am glad I am not to be one of the party on the yacht My respect for myself, Mary, my natural anxiety as to what mother will say I shall see you, darling, before you sail [*He bows to the others and goes*]

ERNEST Selfish brute, only thinking of himself What about my speech?

LADY MARY One maid among three of us What's to be done?

ERNEST Pooh! You must do for yourselves, that's all

LADY MARY Do for ourselves How can we know where our things are kept?

AGATHA Are you aware that dresses button up the back?

CATHERINE How are we to get into our shoes and be prepared for the carriage?

LADY MARY Who is to put us to bed, and who is to get us up, and how shall we ever know it's morning if there is no one to pull up the blinds?

[CRICHTON crosses on his way out]

ERNEST How is his lordship now?

CRICHTON A little easier, sir

LADY MARY Crichton, send Fisher to me [He goes]

ERNEST I have no pity for you girls, I—

LADY MARY Ernest, go away, and don't insult the broken-hearted

ERNEST And uncommon glad I am to go Ta-ta, all of you He asked me to say a few words I came here to say a few words, and I'm not at all sure that I couldn't bring an action against him

[He departs, feeling that he has left a dart behind him The girls are alone with their tragic thoughts]

LADY MARY [become a mother to the younger ones at last] My poor sisters, come here [They go to her doubtfully] We must make this draw us closer together I shall do my best to help you in every way Just now I cannot think of myself at all

AGATHA But how unlike you, Mary

LADY MARY It is my duty to protect my sisters

CATHERINE I never knew her so sweet before, Agatha [Cautiously] What do you propose to do, Mary?

LADY MARY I propose when we are on the yacht to lend Fisher to you when I don't need her myself

AGATHA Fisher?

LADY MARY [who has the most character of the three] Of course, as the eldest, I have decided that it is my maid we shall take with us

CATHERINE [speaking also for AGATHA] Mary, you toad

AGATHA Nothing on earth would induce Fisher to lift her hand for either me or Catherine

LADY MARY I was afraid of it, Agatha That is why I am so sorry for you

[The further exchange of pleasantries is interrupted by the arrival of FISHER]

LADY MARY Fisher, you heard what his lordship said?

FISHER Yes, my lady

LADY MARY [coldly, though the others would have tried blandishment] You have given me some satisfaction of late, Fisher, and to mark my approval I have decided that you shall be the maid who accompanies us

FISHER [acridly] I thank you, my lady

LADY MARY That is all, you may go

FISHER [rapping it out] If you please, my lady, I wish to give notice

[CATHERINE and AGATHA gleam, but LADY MARY is of sterner stuff]

LADY MARY [taking up a book] Oh, certainly—you may go

CATHERINE But why, Fisher?

FISHER I could not undertake, my lady, to wait upon three We don't do it [In an indignant outburst to LADY MARY] Oh, my lady, to think that this affront—

LADY MARY [looking up] I thought I told you to go, Fisher

[FISHER stands for a moment irresolute, then goes As soon as she has gone LADY MARY puts down her book and weeps She is a pretty woman, but this is the only pretty thing we have seen her do yet]

AGATHA [succinctly] Serves you right [CRICHTON comes]

CATHERINE It will be Simmons after all Send Simmons to me

CRICHTON [after hesitating] My lady, might I venture to speak?

CATHERINE What is it?

CRICHTON I happen to know, your ladyship, that Simmons desires to give notice for the same reason as Fisher

CATHERINE Oh!

AGATHA [triumphantly] Then, Catherine, we take Jeanne

CRICHTON And Jeanne also, my lady

[LADY MARY is reading, indifferent though the heavens fall, but her sisters are not ashamed to show their despatch to CRICHTON]

AGATHA We can't blame them Could any maid who respected herself be got to wait upon three?

LADY MARY [with languid interest] I suppose there are such persons, Crichton?

CRICHTON [guardedly] I have heard, my lady, that there are such

LADY MARY [a little desperate] Crichton, what's to be done? We sail in two days, could one be discovered in the time?

AGATHA [frankly a supplicant] Surely you can think of some one?

CRICHTON [after hesitating] There is in this establishment, your ladyship, a young woman—

LADY MARY Yes?

CRICHTON A young woman on whom I have for some time cast an eye

CATHERINE [eagerly] Do you mean as a possible lady's-maid?

CRICHTON I had thought of her, my lady, in another connection

LADY MARY Ah!

CRICHTON But I believe she is quite the young person you require Perhaps if you could see her, my lady—

LADY MARY I shall certainly see her Bring her to me [*He goes*] You two needn't wait

CATHERINE Needn't we? We see your little game, Mary

AGATHA We shall certainly remain and have our two-thirds of her

[*They sit there doggedly until CRICHTON returns with TWEENY, who looks scared*]

CRICHTON This, my lady, is the young person

CATHERINE [*frankly*] Oh dear!

[*It is evident that all three consider her quite unsuitable*]

LADY MARY Come here, girl Don't be afraid

[*TWEENY looks imploringly at her idol*]

CRICHTON Her appearance, my lady, is homely, and her manners, as you may have observed, deplorable, but she has a heart of gold

LADY MARY What is your position downstairs?

TWEENY [*bobbing*] I'm a tweeny, your ladyship

CATHERINE A what?

CRICHTON A tweeny, that is to say, my lady, she is not at present, strictly speaking, anything, a *between* maid, she helps the vegetable maid It is she, my lady, who conveys the dishes from the one end of the kitchen table where they are placed by the cook, to the other end, where they enter into the charge of Thomas and John

LADY MARY I see And you and Crichton are—ah—keeping company?

[*CRICHTON draws himself up*]

TWEENY [*aghast*] A butler don't keep company, my lady

LADY MARY [*indifferent*] Does he not?

CRICHTON No, your ladyship, we butlers may—[*he makes a gesture with his arms*—but we do not keep company

AGATHA I know what it is, you are engaged?

[*TWEENY looks longingly at CRICHTON*]

CRICHTON Certainly not, my lady The utmost I can say at present is that I have cast a favorable eye

[*Even this is much to TWEENY*]

LADY MARY As you choose But I am afraid, Crichton, she will rot suit us

CRICHTON My lady, beneath this sim-

ple exterior are concealed a very sweet nature and rare womanly gifts

AGATHA Unfortunately, that is not what we want

CRICHTON And it is she, my lady, who dresses the hair of the ladies'-maids for our evening meals

[*The ladies are interested at last*]

LADY MARY She dresses Fisher's hair?

TWEENY Yes, my lady, and I does them up when they goes to parties

CRICHTON [*pained, but not scolding*] Does!

TWEENY Doos And it's me what alters your gowns to fit them

CRICHTON What alters!

TWEENY Which alters

AGATHA Mary?

LADY MARY I shall certainly have her

CATHERINE We shall certainly have her Tweeny, we have decided to make a lady's-maid of you

TWEENY Oh laws!

AGATHA We are doing this for you so that your position socially may be more nearly akin to that of Crichton

CRICHTON [*gravely*] It will undoubtedly increase the young person's chances

LADY MARY Then if I get a good character for you from Mrs Perkins, she will make the necessary arrangements

[*She resumes reading*]

TWEENY [*elated*] My lady!

LADY MARY By the way, I hope you are a good sailor

TWEENY [*startled*] You don't mean, my lady, that I'm to go on the ship?

LADY MARY Certainly

TWEENY But — [To CRICHTON] You ain't going, sir?

CRICHTON No

TWEENY [*firm at last*] Then neither ain't I

AGATHA You must

TWEENY Leave him! Not me

LADY MARY Girl, don't be silly Crichton will be—considered in your wages

TWEENY I ain't going

CRICHTON I feared this, my lady

TWEENY Nothing will budge me

LADY MARY Leave the room

[*CRICHTON shows TWEENY out with marked politeness*]

AGATHA Crichton, I think you might have shown more displeasure with her

CRICHTON [*contrite*] I was touched my lady I see, my lady, that to part from her would be a wrench to me, though I could not well say so in her presence, not having yet decided how far I shall go with her

[*He is about to go when LORD LOAM returns, fuming*]
 LORD LOAM The ingrate! The smug! The fop!

CATHERINE What is it now, father?
 LORD LOAM That man or mine Rolleston, refuses to accompany us because you are to have but one maid

AGATHA Hurrah!
 LADY MARY [*in better taste*] Darling father, rather than you should lose Rolleston, we will consent to take all the three of them

LORD LOAM Pooh, nonsense! Crichton find me a valet who can do without three maids

CRICHTON Yes, my lord [*Troubled*] In the time—the more suitable the party, my lord, the less willing will he be to come without the—the usual perquisites

LORD LOAM Any one will do
 CRICHTON [*shocked*] My lord!

LORD LOAM The ingrate! The puppy!
 [AGATHA has an idea, and whispers to LADY MARY]

LADY MARY I ask a favor of a servant?—never!

AGATHA Then I will Crichton, would it not be very distressing to you to let his lordship go, attended by a valet who might prove unworthy? It is only for three months, don't you think that you—you yourself—you—[*As CRICHTON sees what she wants he pulls himself up with noble, offended dignity, and she is appalled*] I beg your pardon

[*He bows stiffly*]
 CATHERINE [*to CRICHTON*] But think of the joy to Tweeny

[*CRICHTON is moved, but he shakes his head*]

LADY MARY [*so much the cleverest*] Crichton, do you think it safe to let the master you love go so far away without you while he has these dangerous views about equality?

[*CRICHTON is profoundly stirred After a struggle he goes to his master, who has been pacing the room*]

CRICHTON My lord, I have found a man

LORD LOAM Already? Who is he?
 [CRICHTON presents himself with a gesture] Yourself?

CATHERINE Father, how good of him
 LORD LOAM [*pleased, but speaking of it as a small thing*] Uncommon good Thank you, Crichton This helps me nicely out of a hole, and how it will annoy Rolleston! Come with me, and we shall tell

him Not that I think you have lowered yourself in any way Come along

[*He goes, and CRICHTON is to follow him, but is stopped by AGATHA impulsively offering him her hand*]

CRICHTON [*who is much shaken*] My lady—a valet's hand!

AGATHA I had no idea you would feel it so deeply, why did you do it?

[*CRICHTON is too respectful to reply*]

LADY MARY [*regarding him*] Crichton, I am curious I insist upon an answer

CRICHTON My lady, I am the son of a butler and a lady's-maid—perhaps the happiest of all combinations, and to me the most beautiful thing in the world is a haughty, aristocratic English house, with every one kept in his place Though I were equal to your ladyship, where would be the pleasure to me? It would be counterbalanced by the pain of feeling that Thomas and John were equal to me

CATHERINE But father says if we were to return to Nature—

CRICHTON If we did, my lady, the first thing we should do would be to elect a head Circumstances might alter cases, the same person might not be master, the same persons might not be servants I can't say as to that, nor should we have the deciding of it Nature would decide for us

LADY MARY You seem to have thought it all out carefully, Crichton

CRICHTON Yes, my lady

CATHERINE And you have done this for us, Crichton, because you thought that—that father needed to be kept in his place?

CRICHTON I should prefer you to say, my lady, that I have done it for the house

AGATHA Thank you, Crichton Mary, be nicer to him [*But LADY MARY has begun to read again*] If there was any way in which we could show our gratitude

CRICHTON If I might venture, my lady, would you kindly show it by becoming more like Lady Mary? That disdain is what we like from our superiors Even so do we, the upper servants, disdain the lower servants, while they take it out of the odds and ends

[*He goes, and they bury themselves in cushions*]

AGATHA Oh dear, what a tiring day
 CATHERINE I feel dead Tuck in your feet, you selfish thing

[*LADY MARY is lying reading on another couch*]

LADY MARY I wonder what he meant by circumstances might alter cases

AGATHA [yawning] Don't talk, Mary, I was nearly asleep

LADY MARY I wonder what he meant by the same person might not be master, and the same persons might not be servants

CATHERINE Do be quiet, Mary, and leave it to Nature, he said Nature would decide

LADY MARY I wonder —

[But she does not wonder very much She would wonder more if she knew what was coming Her book slips unregarded to the floor The ladies are at rest until it is time to dress]

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Two months have elapsed, and the scene is a desert island in the Pacific, on which our adventurers have been wrecked

The curtain rises on a sea of bamboo, which shuts out all view save the foliage of palm trees and some gaunt rocks Occasionally CRICHTON and TREHERNE come momentarily into sight, hacking and hewing the bamboo, through which they are making a clearing between the ladies and the shore, and by and by, owing to their efforts, we shall have an unrestricted outlook on to a sullen sea that is at present hidden Then we shall also be able to note a mast standing out of the water—all that is left, saving floating wreckage, of the ill-fated yacht the Bluebell The beginnings of a hut will also be seen, with CRICHTON driving its walls into the ground or astride its roof of saplings, for at present he is doing more than one thing at a time In a red shirt, with the ends of his sailor's breeches thrust into wading-boots, he looks a man for the moment, we suddenly remember some one's saying—perhaps it was ourselves—that a cataclysm would be needed to get him out of his servant's clothes, and apparently it has been forthcoming It is no longer beneath our dignity to cast an inquiring eye on his appearance His features are not distinguished, but he has a strong jaw and green eyes, in which a yellow light burns that we have not seen before His dark hair, hitherto so decorously sleek, has been ruffled this way and that by wind and weather, as if they were part of the

cataclysm and wanted to help his chance His muscles must be soft and flabby still, but though they shriek aloud to him to desist, he rains lusty blows with his axe, like one who has come upon the open for the first time in his life, and likes it He is as yet far from being an expert woodsman—mark the blood on his hands at places where he has hit them instead of the tree, but note also that he does not waste time in bandaging them—he rubs them in the earth and goes on His face is still of the discreet pallor that befits a butler, and he carries the smaller logs as if they were a salver, not in a day or a month will he shake off the badge of servitude, but without knowing it he has begun

But for the hatchets at work, and an occasional something horrible falling from a tree into the ladies' laps, they hear nothing save the mournful surf breaking on a coral shore

They sit or recline huddled together against a rock, and they are farther from home, in every sense of the word, than ever before Thirty-six hours ago, they were given three minutes in which to dress, without a maid, and reach the boats, and they have not made the best of that valuable time None of them has boots, and had they known this prickly island they would have thought first of boots They have a sufficiency of garments, but some of them were gifts dropped into the boat—LADY MARY'S tarpaulin coat and hat, for instance, and CATHERINE'S blue jersey and red cap, which certify that the two ladies were lately before the mast AGATHA is too gay in ERNEST'S dressing-gown, and clutches it to her person with both hands as if afraid that it may be claimed by its rightful owner There are two pairs of bath slippers between the three of them, and their hair cries aloud and in vain for hairpins

By their side, on an inverted bucket, sits ERNEST, clothed neatly in the garments of day and night, but, alas, barefooted He is the only cheerful member of this company of four, but his brightness is due less to a manly desire to succour the helpless than to his having been lately in the throes of composition, and to his modest satisfaction with the result He reads to the ladies, and they listen, each with one scared eye to the things that fall from trees

ERNEST [*who has written on the fly-leaf of the only book saved from the wreck*] This is what I have written 'Wrecked, wrecked, wrecked' on an island in the Tropics, the following the Hon Ernest Woolley, the Rev John Treherne, the Ladies Mary, Catherine, and Agatha Lasenby, with two servants We are the sole survivors of Lord Loam's steam yacht *Bluebell*, which encountered a fearful gale in these seas, and soon became a total wreck. The crew behaved gallantly, putting us all into the first boat. What became of them I cannot tell, but we, after dreadful sufferings, and insufficiently clad, in whatever garments we could lay hold of in the dark —"

LADY MARY Please don't describe our garments

ERNEST "succeeded in reaching this island, with the loss of only one of our party, namely, Lord Loam, who flung away his life in a gallant attempt to save a servant who had fallen overboard"

[*The ladies have wept long and sore for their father, but there is something in this last utterance that makes them look up*]

AGATHA But, Ernest, it was Crichton who jumped overboard trying to save father

ERNEST [*with the candor that is one of his most engaging qualities*] Well, you know, it was rather silly of uncle to fling away his life by trying to get into the boat first, and as this document may be printed in the English papers, it struck me, an English peer, you know —

LADY MARY [*every inch an English peer's daughter*] Ernest, that is very thoughtful of you

ERNEST [*continuing, well pleased*] — "By night the cries of wild cats and the hissing of snakes terrify us extremely" — [*this does not satisfy him so well, and he makes a correction*] — "terrify the ladies extremely. Against these we have no weapons except one cutlass and a hatchet. A bucket washed ashore is at present our only comfortable seat —"

LADY MARY [*with some spirit*] And Ernest is sitting on it

ERNEST H'sh! Oh, do be quiet — "To add to our horrors, night falls suddenly in these parts, and it is then that savage animals begin to prowl and roar"

LADY MARY Have you said that vampire bats suck the blood from our toes as we sleep?

ERNEST No, that's all. I end up, "Rescue us or we perish. Rich reward. Signed

Ernest Woolley, in command of our little party." This is written on a leaf taken out of a book of poems that Crichton found in his pocket. Fancy Crichton being a reader of poetry. Now I shall put it into the bottle and fling it into the sea. [*He pushes the precious document into a soda-water bottle and rams the cork home. At the same moment, and without effort, he gives birth to one of his most characteristic epigrams*]. The tide is going out, we mustn't miss the post

[*They are so unhappy that they fail to grasp it, and a little petulantly he calls for CRICHTON, ever his stand-by in the hour of epigram. CRICHTON breaks through the undergrowth quickly, thinking the ladies are in danger*]

CRICHTON Anything wrong, sir?

ERNEST [*with fine confidence*] The tide, Crichton, is a postman who calls at our island twice a day for letters

CRICHTON [*after a pause*] Thank you, sir

[*He returns to his labors, however, without giving the smile which is the epigrammatist's right, and ERNEST is a little disappointed in him*]

ERNEST Poor Crichton! I sometimes think he is losing his sense of humor. Come along, Agatha

[*He helps his favorite up the rocks, and they disappear gingerly from view*]

CATHERINE How horribly still it is

LADY MARY [*remembering some recent sounds*] It is best when it is still

CATHERINE [*drawing closer to her*] Mary, I have heard that they are always very still just before they jump

LADY MARY Don't

[*A distinct chopping is heard, and they are startled*]

LADY MARY [*controlling herself*] It is only Crichton knocking down trees

CATHERINE [*almost imploringly*] Mary, let us go and stand beside him

LADY MARY [*coldly*] Let a servant see that I am afraid!

CATHERINE Don't, then, but remember this, dear, they often drop on one from above

[*She moves away, nearer to the friendly sound of the axe, and LADY MARY is left alone. She is the most courageous of them as well as the haughtiest, but when something she had thought to be a stick glides toward her, she forgets her dignity and screams*]

LADY MARY [*calling*] Crichton, Crichton!

[*It must have been TREHERNE who was tree-felling, for CRICHTON comes to her from the hut, drawing his cutlass*]

CRICHTON [anxious] Did you call, my lady?

LADY MARY [herself again, now that he is there] I! Why should I?

CRICHTON I made a mistake, your ladyship [*Hesitating*] If you are afraid of being alone, my lady—

LADY MARY Afraid! Certainly not [*Doggedly*] You may go

[*But she does not complain when he remains within eyesight cutting the bamboo. It is heavy work, and she watches him silently*]

LADY MARY I wish, Crichton, you could work without getting so hot

CRICHTON [*mopping his face*] I wish I could, my lady

[*He continues his labors*]

LADY MARY [*taking off her oilskins*] It makes me hot to look at you

CRICHTON It almost makes me cool to look at your ladyship

LADY MARY [*who perhaps thinks he is presuming*] Anything I can do for you in that way, Crichton, I shall do with pleasure

CRICHTON [*quite humbly*] Thank you, my lady

[*By this time most of the bamboo has been cut, and the shore and the sea are visible, except where they are hidden by the half-completed hut. The mast rising solitary from the water adds to the desolation of the scene, and at last tears run down LADY MARY'S face*]

CRICHTON Don't give way, my lady, things might be worse

LADY MARY My poor father

CRICHTON If I could have given my life for his

LADY MARY You did all a man could do. Indeed I thank you, Crichton [*With some admiration and more wonder*] You are a man

CRICHTON Thank you, my lady

LADY MARY But it is all so awful. Crichton, is there any hope of a ship coming?

CRICHTON [*after hesitation*] Of course there is, my lady

LADY MARY [*facing him bravely*] Don't treat me as a child. I have got to know the worst, and to face it. Crichton, the truth

CRICHTON [*reluctantly*] We were driven out of our course, my lady, I fear far from the track of commerce

LADY MARY Thank you, I understand

[*For a moment, however, she breaks down. Then she clenches her hands and stands erect*]

CRICHTON [*watching her, and forgetting perhaps for the moment that they are not just a man and woman*] You're a good pluckt 'un, my lady

LADY MARY [*falling into the same error*] I shall try to be [*Extricating herself*] Crichton, how dare you?

CRICHTON I beg your ladyship's pardon, but you are [*She smiles, as if it were a comfort to be told this even by CRICHTON*] And until a ship comes we are three men who are going to do our best for you ladies

LADY MARY [*with a curl of the lip*] Mr Ernest does no work

CRICHTON [*cheerily*] But he will, my lady

LADY MARY I doubt it

CRICHTON [*confidently, but perhaps thoughtlessly*] No work—no dinner—will make a great change in Mr Ernest

LADY MARY No work—no dinner. When did you invent that rule, Crichton?

CRICHTON [*loaded with bamboo*] I didn't invent it, my lady. I seem to see it growing all over the island

LADY MARY [*disquieted*] Crichton, your manner strikes me as curious

CRICHTON [*pained*] I hope not, your ladyship

LADY MARY [*determined to have it out with him*] You are not implying anything so unnatural, I presume, as that if I and my sisters don't work there will be no dinner for us?

CRICHTON [*brighily*] If it is unnatural, my lady, that is the end of it

LADY MARY If? Now I understand. The perfect servant at home holds that we are all equal now. I see

CRICHTON [*wounded to the quick*] My lady, can you think me so inconsistent?

LADY MARY That was it

CRICHTON [*earnestly*] My lady, I disbelieved in equality at home because it was against nature, and for the same reason I as utterly disbelieve in it on an island

LADY MARY [*relieved by his obvious sincerity*] I apologize

CRICHTON [*continuing unfortunately*] There must always, my lady, be one to command and others to obey

LADY MARY [*satisfied*] One to command, others to obey. Yes [*Then suddenly she realizes that there may be a dire meaning in his confident words*] Crichton!

CRICHTON [*who has intended no dire meaning*] What is it, my lady?

[*But she only stares into his face and then hurries from him. Left alone he is puzzled, but being a practical man he busies himself gathering firewood, until TWEEVY appears excitedly carrying cocoa-nuts in her skirt. She has made better use than the ladies of her three minutes' grace for dressing.*]

TWEEVY [*who can be happy even on an island if CRICHTON is with her*] Look what I found

CRICHTON Cocoa-nuts. Bravo!

TWEEVY They grow on trees

CRICHTON Where did you think they grew?

TWEEVY I thought as how they grew in rows on top of little sticks

CRICHTON [*wrinkling his brows*] Oh Tweeny, Tweeny!

TWEEVY [*anxiously*] Have I offended of your feelings again, sir?

CRICHTON A little

TWEEVY [*in a despairing outburst*] I'm full o' vulgar words and ways, and though I may keep them in their holes when you are by, as soon as I'm by myself out they comes in a rush like beetles when the house is dark. I says them gloating-like, in my head—"Blooming" I says, and "All my eye," and "Ginger," and "Nothin'," and all the time we was being wrecked I was praying to myself, "Please the Lord it may be an island as it's natural to be vulgar on" [*A shudder passes through CRICHTON, and she is aghast*]. That's the kind I am, sir. I'm 'opeless. You'd better give me up.

[*She is a pathetic, forlorn creature, and his manhood is stirred.*]

CRICHTON [*wondering a little at himself for saying it*] I won't give you up. It is strange that one so common should attract one so fastidious, but so it is [*Thoughtfully*]. There is something about you, Tweeny, there is a *je ne sais quoi* about you.

TWEEVY [*knowing only that he has found something in her to commend*] Is there, is there? Oh, I am glad.

CRICHTON [*putting his hand on her shoulder like a protector*] We shall fight your vulgarity together [*All this time he has been arranging sticks for his fire*]. Now get some dry grass.

[*She brings him grass, and he puts it under the sticks. He produces an old lens from his pocket, and tries to focus the sun's rays.*]

TWEEVY Why, what is that?

CRICHTON [*the ingenious creature*] That's the glass from my watch and one from Mr Treherne's, with a little water between them. I am hoping to kindle a fire with it.

TWEEVY [*properly impressed*] Oh sir! [*After one failure the glass takes fire, and they are blowing on it when excited cries near by bring them sharply to their feet. AGATHA runs to them, white of face, followed by ERNEST.*]

ERNEST Danger! Crichton, a tiger-cat!

CRICHTON [*getting his cutlass*]

Where?

AGATHA It is at our heels.
ERNEST Look out, Crichton.

CRICHTON H'sh!
[*TREHERNE comes to his assistance, while LADY MARY and CATHERINE join AGATHA in the hut.*]

ERNEST It will be on us in a moment [*He seizes the hatchet and guards the hut. It is pleasing to see that ERNEST is no coward.*]

TREHERNE Listen!

ERNEST The grass is moving. It's coming.

[*It comes. But it is no tiger-cat, it is LORD LOAM crawling on his hands and knees, a very exhausted and dishevelled peer, wondrously attired in rags. The girls see him, and with glad cries rush into his arms.*]

LADY MARY Father

LORD LOAM Mary—Catherine—Agatha. Oh dear, my dears, my dears, oh dear!

LADY MARY Darling

AGATHA Sweetest

CATHERINE Love

TREHERNE Glad to see you, sir

ERNEST Uncle, uncle, dear old uncle

[*For a time such happy cries fill the air, but presently TREHERNE is thoughtless.*]

TREHERNE Ernest thought you were a tiger-cat.

LORD LOAM [*stung somehow to the quick*] Oh, did you? I knew you at once, Ernest, I knew you by the way you ran.

[*ERNEST smiles forgivingly.*]

CRICHTON [*venturing forward at last*]

My lord, I am glad

ERNEST [*with upraised finger*] But you are also idling, Crichton [*Making himself comfortable on the ground*]. We mustn't waste time. To work, to work.

CRICHTON [*after contemplating him without rancor*] Yes, sir

[*He gets a pot from the hut and hangs*

it on a tripod over the fire, which is now burning brightly]

TREHERNE Ernest, you be a little more civil Crichton, let me help

[He is soon busy helping CRICHTON to add to the strength of the hut]

LORD LOAM *[gazing at the pot as ladies are said to gaze on precious stones]* Is that—but I suppose I'm dreaming again *[Timidly]* It isn't by any chance a pot on top of a fire, is it?

LADY MARY Indeed, it is, dearest It is our supper

LORD LOAM I have been dreaming of a pot on a fire for two days *[Quivering]* There's nothing in it, is there?

ERNEST Sniff, uncle

[LORD LOAM sniffs]

LORD LOAM *[reverently]* It smells of onions!

[There is a sudden diversion]

CATHERINE Father, you have boots!

LADY MARY So he has

LORD LOAM Of course I have

ERNEST *[with greedy cunning]* You are actually wearing boots, uncle It's very unsafe, you know, in this climate

LORD LOAM Is it?

ERNEST We have all abandoned them, you observe The blood, the arteries, you know

LORD LOAM I hadn't a notion

[He holds out his feet and ERNEST kneels]

ERNEST O Lord, yes

[In another moment those boots will be his]

LADY MARY *[quickly]* Father, he is trying to get your boots from you There is nothing in the world we would not give for boots

ERNEST *[rising haughtily, a proud spirit misunderstood]* I only wanted the loan of them

AGATHA *[running her fingers along them lovingly]* If you lend them to any one, it will be to us, won't it, father?

LORD LOAM Certainly, my child

ERNEST Oh, very well *[He is leaving these selfish ones]* I don't want your old boots *[He gives his uncle a last chance]* You don't think you could spare me one boot?

LORD LOAM *[tartly]* I do not

ERNEST Quite so Well, all I can say is I'm sorry for you

[He departs to recline elsewhere]

LADY MARY Father, we thought we should never see you again

LORD LOAM I was washed ashore, my

dear, clinging to a hencoop How awful that first night was!

LADY MARY Poor father

LORD LOAM When I woke, I wept Then I began to feel extremely hungry There was a large turtle on the beach I remembered from the *Swiss Family Robinson* that if you turn a turtle over he is helpless My dears, I crawled towards him, I flung myself upon him—*[here he pauses to rub his leg]*—the nasty, spiteful brute

LADY MARY You didn't turn him over?

LORD LOAM *[vindictively, though he is a kindly man]* Mary, the senseless thing wouldn't wait, I found that none of them would wait

CATHERINE We should have been as badly off if Crichton hadn't—

LADY MARY *[quickly]* Don't praise Crichton

LORD LOAM And then those beastly monkeys I always understood that if you flung stones at them they would retaliate by flinging cocoa-nuts at you Would you believe it I flung a hundred stones and not one monkey had sufficient intelligence to grasp my meaning How I longed for Crichton

LADY MARY *[wincing]* For us also, father?

LORD LOAM For you also I tried for hours to make a fire The authors say that when wrecked on an island you can obtain a light by rubbing two pieces of stick together *[With feeling]* The liars!

LADY MARY And all this time you thought there was no one on the island but yourself?

LORD LOAM I thought so until this morning I was searching the pools for little fishes, which I caught in my hat, when suddenly I saw before me—on the sand—

CATHERINE What?

LORD LOAM A hairpin

LADY MARY A hairpin! It must be one of ours Give it me, father

AGATHA No, it's mine

LORD LOAM I didn't keep it

LADY MARY *[speaking for all three]* Didn't keep it? Found a hairpin on an island and didn't keep it?

LORD LOAM *[humbly]* My dears

AGATHA *[scarcely to be placated]* Oh father, we have returned to nature more than you bargained for

LADY MARY For shame, Agatha *[She has something on her mind]* Father, there is something I want you to do at once—I

mean assert your position as the chief person on the island

[*They are all surprised*]

LORD LOAM But who would presume to question it?

CATHERINE She must mean Ernest

LADY MARY Must I?

AGATHA It's cruel to say anything against Ernest

LORD LOAM [*firmly*] If any one presumes to challenge my position, I shall make short work of him

AGATHA Here comes Ernest, now see if you can say these horrid things to his face

LORD LOAM I shall teach him his place at once

LADY MARY [*anxiously*] But how?

LORD LOAM [*chuckling*] I have just thought of an extremely amusing way of doing it [*As ERNEST approaches*] Ernest

ERNEST [*loftily*] Excuse me, uncle, I'm thinking I'm planning out the building of this hut

LORD LOAM I also have been thinking

ERNEST That don't matter

LORD LOAM Eh?

ERNEST Please, please, this is important

LORD LOAM I've been thinking that I ought to give you my boots

ERNEST What!

LADY MARY Father

LORD LOAM [*genuinely*] Take them, my boy [*With a rapidity we had not thought him capable of, ERNEST becomes the wearer of the boots*] And now I dare say you want to know why I give them to you, Ernest?

ERNEST [*moving up and down in them deliciously*] Not at all The great thing is, "I've got 'em, I've got 'em"

LORD LOAM [*majestically, but with a knowing look at his daughters*] My reason is that, as head of our little party, you, Ernest, shall be our hunter, you shall clear the forests of those savage beasts that make them so dangerous [*Pleasantly*] And now you know, my dear nephew, why I have given you my boots

ERNEST This is my answer

[*He kicks off the boots*]

LADY MARY [*still anxious*] Father, assert yourself

LORD LOAM I shall now assert myself [*But how to do it? He has a happy thought*] Call Crichton

LADY MARY Oh father

[*Crichton comes in answer to a summons and is followed by TREHERNE*]

ERNEST [*wondering a little at LADY MARY'S grave face*] Crichton, look here

LORD LOAM [*sturdily*] Silence! Crichton, I want your advice as to what I ought to do with Mr Ernest He has defied me

ERNEST Pooh!

CRICHTON [*after considering*] May I speak openly, my lord?

LADY MARY [*keeping her eyes fixed on him*] That is what we desire

CRICHTON [*quite humbly*] Then I may say, your lordship, that I have been considering Mr Ernest's case at odd moments ever since we were wrecked

ERNEST My case?

LORD LOAM [*sternly*] Hush

CRICHTON Since we landed on the island, my lord, it seems to me that Mr Ernest's epigrams have been particularly brilliant

ERNEST [*gratified*] Thank you, Crichton

CRICHTON But I find—I seem to find it growing wild, my lord, in the woods, that sayings which would be justly admired in England are not much use on an island I would therefore most respectfully propose that henceforth every time Mr Ernest favors us with an epigram his head should be immersed in a bucket of cold spring water [*There is a terrible silence*]

LORD LOAM [*uneasily*] Serve him right

ERNEST I should like to see you try to do it, uncle

CRICHTON [*ever ready to come to the succour of his lordship*] My feeling, my lord, is that at the next offence I should convey him to a retired spot, where I shall carry out the undertaking in as respectful a manner as is consistent with thorough immersion

[*Though his manner is most respectful, he is firm, he evidently means what he says*]

LADY MARY [*a ramrod*] Father, you must not permit this, Ernest is your nephew

LORD LOAM [*with his hand to his brow*] After all, he is my nephew, Crichton, and, as I am sure, he now sees that I am a strong man—

ERNEST [*foolishly in the circumstances*] A strong man You mean a stout man You are one of mind to two of matter

[*He looks round in the old way for approval No one has smiled, and to his*

consignation he sees that CRICHTON is quietly turning up his sleeves ERNEST makes an appealing gesture to his uncle, then he turns defiantly to CRICHTON]

CRICHTON Is it to be before the ladies, Mr Ernest, or in the privacy of the wood? [*He fixes ERNEST with his eye ERNEST is cowed*] Come

ERNEST [*affecting bravado*] Oh, all right

CRICHTON [*succinctly*] Bring the bucket

[*ERNEST hesitates He then lifts the bucket and follows CRICHTON to the nearest spring*]

LORD LOAM [*rather white*] I'm sorry for him, but I had to be firm

LADY MARY Oh, father, it wasn't you who was firm Crichton did it himself

LORD LOAM Bless me, so he did

LADY MARY Father, be strong

LORD LOAM [*bewildered*] You can't mean that my faithful Crichton—

LADY MARY Yes, I do

TREHERNE Lady Mary, I stake my word that Crichton is incapable of acting dishonourably

LADY MARY I know that, I know it as well as you Don't you see that that is what makes him so dangerous?

TREHERNE By Jove, I—I believe I catch your meaning

CATHERINE He is coming back

LORD LOAM [*who has always known himself to be a man of ideas*] Let us all go into the hut, just to show him at once that it is our hut

LADY MARY [*as they go*] Father, I implore you, assert yourself now and for ever

LORD LOAM I will

LADY MARY And, please, don't ask him how you are to do it

[*CRICHTON returns with sticks to mend the fire*]

LORD LOAM [*loftily, from the door of the hut*] Have you carried out my instructions, Crichton?

CRICHTON [*deferentially*] Yes, my lord

[*ERNEST appears, mopping his hair, which has become very wet since we last saw him He is not becoming malice, he is too busy drying, but AGATHA is specially his champion*]

AGATHA It's infamous, infamous

LORD LOAM [*strongly*] My orders, Agatha

LADY MARY Now, father, please

LORD LOAM [*striking an attitude*] Be-

fore I give you any further orders, Crichton—

CRICHTON Yes, my lord

LORD LOAM [*delighted*] Pooh! It's all right

LADY MARY No Please go on

LORD LOAM Well, well This question of leadership, what do you think now, Crichton?

CRICHTON My Lord, I feel it is a matter with which I have nothing to do

LORD LOAM Excellent Ha, Mary? That settles it, I think

LADY MARY It seems to, but—I'm not sure

CRICHTON It will settle itself naturally, my lord, without any interference from us [*This reference to Nature gives general dissatisfaction*]

LADY MARY Father

LORD LOAM [*a little severely*] It settled itself long ago, Crichton, when I was born a peer, and you, for instance, were born a servant

CRICHTON [*acquiescing*] Yes, my lord, that was how it all came about quite naturally in England We had nothing to do with it there, and we shall have as little to do with it here

TREHERNE [*relieved*] That's all right

LADY MARY [*determined to clinch the matter*] One moment In short, Crichton, his lordship will continue to be our natural head

CRICHTON I dare say, my lady, I dare say

CATHERINE But you must know

CRICHTON Asking your pardon, my lady, one can't be sure—on an island

[*They look at each other uneasily*]

LORD LOAM [*warningly*] Crichton, I don't like this

CRICHTON [*harassed*] The more I think of it, your lordship, the more uneasy I become myself When I heard, my lord, that you had left that hairpin behind—

[*He is pained*]

LORD LOAM [*jeebly*] One hairpin among so many would only have caused dissension

CRICHTON [*very sorry to have to contradict him*] Not so, my lord From that hairpin we could have made a needle, with that needle we could, out of skins, have sewn trousers—of which your lordship is in need, indeed, we are all in need of them

LADY MARY [*suddenly self-conscious*] All?

CRICHTON On an island, my lady

LADY MARY Father

CRICHTON [*really more distressed by the prospect than she*] My lady, if Nature does not think them necessary, you may be sure she will not ask you to wear them [*Shaking his head*] But among all this undergrowth—

LADY MARY Now you see this man in his true colors

LORD LOAM [*violently*] Crichton, you will either this moment say, "Down with Nature," or—

CRICHTON [*scandalized*] My lord!

LORD LOAM [*loftily*] Then this is my last word to you, take a month's notice

[*If the hut had a door he would now shut it to indicate that the interview is closed*]

CRICHTON [*in great distress*] Your lordship, the disgrace—

LORD LOAM [*swelling*] Not another word you may go

LADY MARY [*adamant*] And don't come to me, Crichton, for a character

ERNEST [*whose immersion has cleared his brain*] Aren't you all forgetting that this is an island?

[*This brings them to earth with a bump*]

LORD LOAM [*looks to his eldest daughter for the fitting response*]

LADY MARY [*equal to the occasion*] It makes only this difference—that you may go at once, Crichton, to some other part of the island

[*The faithful servant has been true to his superiors ever since he was created, and never more true than at this moment, but his fidelity is founded on trust in Nature, and to be untrue to it would be to be untrue to them. He lets the wood he has been gathering slip to the ground, and bows his sorrowful head. He turns to obey. Then affection for these great ones wells up in him.*]

CRICHTON My lady, let me work for you

LADY MARY Go

CRICHTON You need me so sorely, I can't desert you, I won't

LADY MARY [*in alarm, lest the others may yield*] Then, father, there is but one alternative, we must leave him

[*LORD LOAM is looking yearningly at CRICHTON*]

TREHERNE It seems a pity

CATHERINE [*forlornly*] You will work for us?

TREHERNE Most willingly. But I must warn you all that, so far, Crichton has done nine-tenths of the scoring

LADY MARY The question is, are we to leave this man?

LORD LOAM [*wrapping himself in his dignity*] Come, my dears

CRICHTON My lord!

LORD LOAM Treherne—Ernest—get our things

ERNEST We don't have any, uncle. They all belong to Crichton

TREHERNE Everything we have he brought from the wreck—he went back to it before it sank. He risked his life

CRICHTON My lord, anything you would care to take is yours

LADY MARY [*quickly*] Nothing

ERNEST Rot! If I could have your socks, Crichton—

LADY MARY Come, father, we are ready

[*Followed by the others, she and LORD LOAM pick their way up the rocks. In their indignation they scarcely notice that daylight is coming to a sudden end.*]

CRICHTON My lord, I implore you—I am not desirous of being head. Do you have a try at it, my lord?

LORD LOAM [*outraged*] A try at it!

CRICHTON [*eagerly*] It may be that you will prove to be the best man

LORD LOAM May be! My children, come

[*They disappear proudly in single file.*]

TREHERNE Crichton, I'm sorry, but of course I must go with them

CRICHTON Certainly, sir [*He calls to TWEENY, and she comes from behind the hut, where she has been watching breathlessly.*] Will you be so kind, sir, as to take her to the others?

TREHERNE Assuredly

TWEENY But what do it all mean?

CRICHTON Does, Tweeny, does [*He passes her up the rocks to TREHERNE.*] We shall meet again soon, Tweeny. Good night, sir

TREHERNE Good night. I dare say they are not far away

CRICHTON [*thoughtfully*] They went westward, sir, and the wind is blowing in that direction. That may mean, sir, that Nature is already taking the matter into her own hands. They are all hungry, sir, and the pot has come a-boil [*He takes off the lid.*] The smell will be borne westward. That pot is full of Nature, Mr. Treherne. Good night, sir

TREHERNE Good night

[*He mounts the rocks with TWEENY, and they are heard for a little time after their figures are swallowed up in the fast growing darkness.* CRICHTON stands motionless, the lid in his hand,

though he has forgotten it, and his reason for taking it off the pot. He is deeply stirred, but presently is ashamed of his dejection, for it is as if he had doubted his principles. Bravely true to his faith that Nature will decide now as ever before, he proceeds manfully with his preparations for the night. He lights a ship's lantern, one of several treasures he has brought ashore, and is filling his pipe with crumbs of tobacco from various pockets, when the stealthy movements of some animal in the grass startles him. With the lantern in one hand and the cullass in the other, he searches the ground around the hut. He returns, lights his pipe, and sits down by the fire, which casts weird moving shadows. There is a red gleam on his face, in the darkness he is a strong and perhaps rather sinister figure. In the great stillness that has fallen over the land, the wash of the surf seems to have increased in volume. The sound is indescribably mournful. Except where the fire is, desolation has fallen on the island like a pall.

Once or twice, as Nature dictates CRICHTON leans forward to stir the pot, and the smell is borne westward. He then resumes his silent vigil.

Shadows other than those cast by the fire begin to descend the rocks. They are the adventurers returning. One by one they steal nearer to the pot until they are squatted around it, with their hands out to the blaze. LADY MARY only is absent. Presently she comes within sight of the others, then stands against a tree with her teeth clenched. One wonders, perhaps, what Nature is to make of her.]

END OF ACT II

ACT III

The scene is the hall of their island home two years later. This sturdy log-house is no mere extension of the hut we have seen in process of erection, but has been built a mile or less to the west of it, on higher ground and near a stream. When the master chose this site, the others thought that all he expected from the stream was a sufficiency of drinking water. They know better now every time they go down to the mill or turn on the electric light.

This hall is the living-room of the house, and walls and roof are of stout logs. Across the joists supporting the roof are laid many home-made implements, such as spades, saws, fishing-rods, and from hooks in the joists are suspended cured foods, of which hams are specially in evidence. Deep recesses half way up the walls contain various provender in barrels and sacks. There are some skins, trophies of the chase, on the floor, which is otherwise bare. The chairs and tables are in some cases hewn out of solid wood, and in others the result of rough but efficient carpentering. Various pieces of wreckage from the yacht have been turned to novel uses, thus the steering wheel now hangs from the centre of the roof, with electric lights attached to it encased in bladders. A lifebuoy has become the back of a chair. Two barrels have been halved and turn coyly from each other as a settee.

The farther end of the room is more strictly the kitchen, and is a great recess, which can be shut off from the hall by folding doors. There is a large open fire in it. The chimney is half of one of the boats of the yacht. On the walls of the kitchen proper are many plate-racks, containing shells, there are rows of these of one size and shape, which mark them off as dinner plates or bowls, others are as obviously tureens. They are arranged primly as in a well-conducted kitchen, indeed, neatness and cleanliness are the note struck everywhere, yet the effect of the whole is romantic and barbaric.

The outer door into this hall is a little peculiar on an island. It is covered with skins and is in four leaves, like the swing doors of fashionable restaurants, which allow you to enter without allowing the hot air to escape. During the winter season our castaways have found the contrivance useful, but CRICHTON'S brain was perhaps a little lordly when he conceived it. Another door leads by a passage to the sleeping-rooms of the house, which are all on the ground-floor, and to CRICHTON'S work-room, where he is at this moment, and whither we should like to follow him, but in a play we may not, as it is out of sight. There is a large window space without a window which, however, can be shuttered, and through this we have a view of cattle-

sheds, fowl-pens, and a field of gram
It is a fine summer evening

TWEENEY *is sitting there, very busy plucking the feathers off a bird and dropping them on a sheet placed for that purpose on the floor. She is trilling to herself in the lightness of her heart. We may remember that TWEENEY, alone among the women, had dressed wisely for an island when they fled the yacht, and her going-away gown still adheres to her, though in fragments. A score of pieces have been added here and there as necessity compelled, and these have been patched and repatched in incongruous colors, but when all is said and done, it can still be maintained that TWEENEY wears a skirt. She is deservedly proud of her skirt, and sometimes lends it on important occasions when approached in the proper spirit.*

Some one outside has been whistling to TWEENEY, the guarded whistle which, on a less savage island, is sometimes assumed to be an indication to cook that the constable is willing, if the coast be clear TWEENEY, however, is engrossed, or perhaps she is not in the mood for a follower, so he climbs in at the window undaunted, to take her willy-nilly. He is a jolly-looking laboring man, who answers to the name of DADDY, and— But though that may be his island name, we recognize him at once. He is LORD LOAM, settled down to the new conditions, and enjoying life heartily as handyman about the happy home. He is comfortably attired in skins. He is still stout, but all the flabbiness has dropped from him, gone, too, is his pomposity, his eye is clear, brown his skin, he could leap a gate.

In his hands he carries an island-made concertina, and such is the exuberance of his spirits that, as he lights on the floor, he bursts into music and song, something about his being a chickety chickety chick chuck, and will TWEENEY please to tell him whose chickety chuck is she. Retribution follows sharp. We hear a whirr, as if from insufficiently oiled machinery, and over the passage door appears a placard showing the one word "Silence." His lordship stops, and steals to TWEENEY on his tiptoes.

LORD LOAM I thought the Gov was out

TWEENEY Well, you see he 'ain't. And if he were to catch you here idling—

[LORD LOAM pales. He lays aside his musical instrument and hurriedly dons an apron. TWEENEY gives him the bird to pluck, and busies herself laying the table for dinner.]

LORD LOAM [*softly*] What is he doing now?

TWEENEY I think he's working out that plan for laying on hot and cold.

LORD LOAM [*proud of his master*] And he'll manage it too. The man who could build a blacksmith's forge without tools—

TWEENEY [*not less proud*] He made the tools.

LORD LOAM Out of half a dozen rusty nails. The sawmill, Tweeny, the speaking-tube, the electric lighting, and look at the use he had made of the bits of the yacht that were washed ashore. And all in two years. He's a master. I'm proud to pluck for

[*He chirps happily at his work, and she regards him curiously.*]

TWEENEY Daddy, you're of little use, but you're a bright, cheerful creature to have about the house. [*He beams at this commendation.*] Do you ever think of old times now? We was a bit different.

LORD LOAM [*pausing*] Circumstances alter cases.

[*He resumes his plucking contentedly.*]

TWEENEY But, Daddy, if the chance was to come of getting back?

LORD LOAM I have given up bothering about it.

TWEENEY You bothered that day long ago when we saw a ship passing the island. How we all an like crazy folk into the water, Daddy, and screamed and held out our arms. [*They are both a little agitated.*] But it sailed away, and we've never seen another.

LORD LOAM If we had had the electrical contrivance we have now we could have attracted that ship's notice. [*Their eyes rest on a mysterious apparatus that fills a corner of the hall.*] A touch on that lever, Tweeny, and in a few moments bonfires would be blazing all round the shore.

TWEENEY [*backing from the lever as if it might spring at her*] It's the most wonderful thing he has done.

LORD LOAM [*in a reverie*] And then—England—home!

TWEENEY [*also seeing visions*] London of a Saturday night!

LORD LOAM My lords, in rising once more to address this historic chamber—

TWEENY There was a little ham and beef shop off the Edgware Road—

[*The visions fade, they return to the practical*]

LORD LOAM Tweeny, do you think I could have an egg to my tea?

[*At this moment a wiry, athletic figure in skins darkens the window He is carrying two pails, which are suspended from a pole on his shoulder, and he is ERNEST We should say that he is ERNEST completely changed if we were of those who hold that people change As he enters by the window he has heard LORD LOAM'S appeal, and is perhaps justifiably indignant*]

ERNEST What is that about an egg? Why should you have an egg?

LORD LOAM [*with hauteur*] That is my affair, sir [*With a Partisan shot as he withdraws stiffly from the room*] The Gov has never put my head in a bucket

ERNEST [*coming to rest on one of his buckets, and speaking with excusable pride To TWEENY*] Not mine for nearly three months It was only last week, Tweeny, that he said to me, "Ernest, the water cure has worked marvels in you, and I question whether I shall require to dip you any more" [*Complacently*] Of course that sort of thing encourages a fellow

TWEENY [*who has now arranged the dinner table to her satisfaction*] I will say, Einy, I never seen a young chap more improved

ERNEST [*gratified*] Thank you, Tweeny, that's very precious to me [*She retires to the fire to work the great bellows with her foot, and ERNEST turns to TREHERNE, who has come in looking more like a cow-boy than a clergyman He has a small box in his hand which he tries to conceal*] What have you got there, John?

TREHERNE Don't tell anybody It is a little present for the Gov, a set of razors One for each day in the week

ERNEST [*opening the box and examining its contents*] Shells! He'll like that He likes sets of things

TREHERNE [*in a guarded voice*] Have you noticed that?

ERNEST Rather

TREHERNE He's becoming a bit magnificent in his ideas

ERNEST [*hushily*] John, it sometimes gives me the creeps

TREHERNE [*making sure that TWEENY is out of hearing*] What do you think of that brilliant robe he got the girls to make for him?

ERNEST [*uncomfortably*] I think he looks too regal in it

TREHERNE Regal! I sometimes fancy that that's why he's so fond of wearing it [*Practically*] Well, I must take these down to the grindstone and put an edge on them

ERNEST [*button-holing him*] I say, John, I want a word with you

TREHERNE Well?

ERNEST [*become suddenly diffident*] Dash it all, you know, you're a clergyman

TREHERNE One of the best things the Gov has done is to insist that none of you forget it

ERNEST [*taking his courage in his hands*] Then—would you, John?

TREHERNE What?

ERNEST [*twistfully*] Officiate at a marriage ceremony, John?

TREHERNE [*slowly*] Now, that's really odd

ERNEST Odd? Seems to me it's natural And whatever is natural, John is right

TREHERNE I mean that same question has been put to me today already

ERNEST [*eagerly*] By one of the women?

TREHERNE Oh, no, they all put it to me long ago This was by the Gov himself

ERNEST By Jove! [*Admiringly*] I say, John, what an observant beggar he is

TREHERNE Ah! You fancy he was thinking of you?

ERNEST I do not hesitate to affirm, John, that he has seen the love-light in my eyes You answered—

TREHERNE I said Yes, I thought it would be my duty to officiate if called upon

ERNEST You're a brick

TREHERNE [*still pondering*] But I wonder whether he was thinking of you

ERNEST Make your mind easy about that

TREHERNE Well, my best wishes Agatha is a very fine girl

ERNEST Agatha? What made you think it was Agatha?

TREHERNE Man alive, you told me all about it soon after we were wrecked

ERNEST Pooh! Agatha's all very well in her way, John, but I'm flying after bigger game

TREHERNE Ernest, which is it?

ERNEST Tweeny, of course

TREHERNE Tweeny? [*Reprovingly*] Ernest, I hope her cooking has nothing to do with this

ERNEST [*with dignity*] Her cooking has very little to do with it

TREHERNE But does she return your affection?

ERNEST [*simply*] Yes, John, I believe I may say so. I am unworthy of her, but I think I have touched her heart.

TREHERNE [*with a sigh*] Some people seem to have all the luck. As you know, Catherine won't look at me.

ERNEST I'm sorry, John.

TREHERNE It's my deserts, I'm a second eleven sort of chap. Well, my heartiest good wishes, Ernest.

ERNEST Thank you, John. How's the little black pig today?

TREHERNE [*departing*] He has begun to eat again.

[*After a moment's reflection* ERNEST calls to TWEENY]

ERNEST Are you very busy, Tweeny?

TWEENY [*coming to him good-naturedly*] There's always work to do, but if you want me, Ernest—

ERNEST There's something I should like to say to you if you could spare me a moment.

TWEENY Willingly. What is it?

ERNEST What an ass I used to be, Tweeny.

TWEENY [*tolerantly*] Oh, let bygones be bygones.

ERNEST [*sincerely, and at his very best*] I'm no great shakes even now. But listen to this, Tweeny, I have known many women, but until I knew you I never knew any woman.

TWEENY [*to whose uneducated ears this sounds dangerously like an epigram*] Take care—the bucket.

ERNEST [*hurriedly*] I didn't mean it in that way [*He goes chivalrously on his knees*]. Ah, Tweeny, I don't undervalue the bucket, but what I want to say now is that the sweet refinement of a dear girl has done more for me than any bucket could do.

TWEENY [*with large eyes*] Are you offering to walk out with me, Erny?

ERNEST [*passionately*] More than that. I want to build a little house for you—in the sunny glade down by Porcupine Creek. I want to make chairs for you and tables, and knives and forks, and a sideboard for you.

TWEENY [*who is fond of language*] I like to hear you [*Eyeing him*]. Would there be any one in the house except myself, Ernest?

ERNEST [*humbly*] Not often, but just occasionally there would be your adoring husband.

TWEENY [*deceitfully*] It won't do, Ernest.

ERNEST [*pleading*] It isn't as if I should be much there.

TWEENY I know, I know, but I don't love you, Ernest. I'm that sorry.

ERNEST [*putting his case clearly*] Twice a week I should be away altogether—at the dam. On the other days you would never see me from breakfast time to supper [*With the self-abnegation of the true lover*]. If you like I'll even go fishing on Sundays.

TWEENY It's no use, Erny.

ERNEST [*using manfully*] Thank you, Tweeny, it can't be helped [*Then he remembers*]. Tweeny, we shall be disappointing the Gov.

TWEENY [*with a sinking*] What's that?

ERNEST He wanted us to marry.

TWEENY [*b'ankly*] You and me? The Gov? [*Her head droops woefully. From without is heard the whistling of a happier spirit, and TWEENY draws herself up fiercely*]. That's her, that's the thing what has stole his heart from me. [*A stalwart youth appears at the window, so handsome and tinged with vitality that, glad to depose CRICHTON, we cry thankfully, "The hero at last." But it is not the hero, it is the heroine. This splendid boy, clad in skins, is what Nature has done for LADY MARY. She carries bow and arrows and a blow-pipe, and over her shoulder is a fat buck, which she drops with a cry of triumph. Forgetting to enter demurely, she leaps through the window*]. [*Sourly*] Drat you, Polly, why don't you wipe your feet?

LADY MARY [*good-naturedly*] Come, Tweeny, be nice to me. It's a splendid buck [*But TWEENY shakes her off, and retreats to the kitchen fire*].

ERNEST Where did you get it?

LADY MARY [*gaily*] I sighted a herd near Penguin's Creek, but had to creep round Silver Lake to get to windward of them. However, they spotted me and then the fun began. There was nothing for it but to try and run them down, so I singled out a fat buck and away we went down the shore of the lake, up the valley of rolling stones, he doubled into Brawling River and took to the water, but I swam after him, the river is only half a mile broad there, but it runs strong. He went spinning down the rapids, down I went in pursuit, he clambered ashore, I clambered ashore, away we tore helter-skelter up the hill and down again. I lost him in the marshes, got on his track again near Bread

Fruit Wood, and brought him down with an arrow in Firefly Grove

TWEENY [*staring at her*] Aren't you tied?

LADY MARY Tied! It was gorgeous [*She runs up a ladder and deposits her weapons on the joists. She is whistling again.*]

TWEENY [*snapping*] I can't abide a woman whistling

LADY MARY [*indifferently*] I like it

TWEENY [*stamping her foot*] Drop it, Polly, I tell you

LADY MARY [*stung*] I won't I'm as good as you are

[*They are facing each other defiantly.*]

ERNEST [*shocked*] Is this necessary? Think how it would pain him

[*LADY MARY'S eyes take a new expression. We see them soft for the first time.*]

LADY MARY [*contritely*] Tweeny, I beg your pardon. If my whistling annoys you, I shall try to cure myself of it [*Instead of calming TWEENY, this floods her face in tears.*]. Why, how can that hurt you, Tweeny, dear?

TWEENY Because I can't make you lose your temper

LADY MARY [*divinely*] Indeed, I often do. Would that I were nicer to everybody

TWEENY There you are again [*Wistfully*]. What makes you want to be so nice, Polly?

LADY MARY [*with fervor*] Only thankfulness, Tweeny [*She exults*]. It is such fun to be alive

[*So also seem to think CATHERINE and AGATHA, who bounce in with fishing-rods and creel. They, too, are in manly attire.*]

CATHERINE We've got some ripping fish for the Gov's dinner. Are we in time? We ran all the way

TWEENY [*tartly*] You'll please to cook them yourself, Kitty, and look sharp about it

[*She retires to her hearth, where AGATHA follows her.*]

AGATHA [*yearning*] Has the Gov decided who is to wait upon him to-day?

CATHERINE [*who is cleaning her fish*] It's my turn

AGATHA [*hotly*] I don't see that

TWEENY [*with bitterness*] It's to be neither of you, Aggy, he wants Polly again

[*LADY MARY is unable to resist a joyous whistle.*]

AGATHA [*jealously*] Polly, you toad

[*But they cannot make LADY MARY angry.*]

TWEENY [*storming*] How dare you look so happy?

LADY MARY [*willing to embrace her*] I wish, Tweeny, there was anything I could do to make you happy also

TWEENY Me! Oh, I'm happy [*She remembers ERNEST, whom it is easy to forget on an island.*] I've just had a proposal, I tell you

[*LADY MARY is shaken at last, and her sisters with her.*]

AGATHA A proposal?

CATHERINE [*going white*] Not—not [*She dare not say his name.*]

ERNEST [*with singular modesty*] You needn't be alarmed, it's only me

LADY MARY [*relieved*] Oh, you!

AGATHA [*happy again*] Ernest, you dear, I got such a shock

CATHERINE It was only Ernest [*Showing him her fish in thankfulness.*] They are beautifully fresh, come and help me to cook them

ERNEST [*with simple dignity*] Do you mind if I don't cook fish to-night? [*She does not mind in the least. They have all forgotten him. A lark is singing in three hearts.*] I think you might all be a little sorry for a chap [*But they are not even sorry, and he addresses AGATHA in these winged words.*] I'm particularly disappointed in you, Aggy, seeing that I was half engaged to you, I think you might have had the good feeling to be a little more hurt

AGATHA Oh, bother

ERNEST [*summing up the situation in so far as it affects himself.*] I shall now go and lie down for a bit

[*He retires coldly but unregretted. LADY MARY approaches TWEENY with her most insinuating smile.*]

LADY MARY Tweeny, as the Gov has chosen me to wait on him, please may I have the loan of it again?

[*The reference made with such charming delicacy is evidently to TWEENY'S skirt.*]

TWEENY [*doggedly*] No, you mayn't

AGATHA [*supporting TWEENY*] Don't you give it to her

LADY MARY [*still trying sweet persuasion.*] You know quite well that he prefers to be waited on in a skirt

TWEENY I don't care. Get one for yourself

LADY MARY It is the only one on the island

TWEENY And it's mine

LADY MARY [*an aristocrat after all*]
Tweeny, give me that skirt directly

CATHERINE Don't

TWEENY I won't

LADY MARY [*clearing for action*] I shall make you

TWEENY I should like to see you try
[*An unseemly fracas appears to be inevitable, but something happens. The whir is again heard, and the notice displayed "Dogs delight to bark and bite" [Its effect is instantaneous and cheering. The ladies look at each other guiltily and immediately proceed on tiptoe to their duties. These are all concerned with the master's dinner. CATHERINE attends to his fish. AGATHA fills a quamt toast-rack and brings the menu, which is written on a shell. LADY MARY twists a wreath of green leaves around her head, and places a flower beside the master's plate. TWEENY signs that all is ready, and she and the younger sisters retire into the kitchen, drawing the screen that separates it from the rest of the room. LADY MARY beats a tom-tom, which is the dinner bell. She then gently works a punkah, which we have not hitherto observed, and stands at attention. No doubt she is in hopes that the Gov. will enter into conversation with her, but she is too good a parlor-maid to let her hopes appear in her face. We may watch her manner with complete approval. There is not one of us who would not give her £26 a year.*]

The master comes in quietly, a book in his hand, still the only book on the island, for he has not thought it worth while to build a printing-press. His dress is not noticeably different from that of the others, the skins are similar, but perhaps these are a trifle more carefully cut or he carries them better. One sees somehow that he has changed for his evening meal. There is an odd suggestion of a dinner jacket about his doeskin coat. It is, perhaps, too grave a face for a man of thirty-two, as if he were over much immersed in affairs, yet there is a sunny smile left to lighten it at times and bring back its youth, perhaps too intellectual a face to pass as strictly handsome, not sufficiently suggestive of oats. His tall figure is very straight, slight rather than thick-set, but nobly muscular. His big hands firm and hard with labor though they be, are finely shaped—note the fingers

so much more tapered, the nails better tended than those of his domestics, they are one of many indications that he is of a superior breed. Such signs, as has often been pointed out, are infallible. A romantic figure, too. One can easily see why the women-folks of this strong man's house both adore and fear him.

He does not seem to notice who is waiting on him tonight, but inclines his head slightly to whoever it is, as she takes her place at the back of his chair. LADY MARY respectfully places the menu-shell before him, and he glances at it.

CRICHTON Clear, please

[LADY MARY knocks on the screen, and a serving hutch in it opens, through which TWEENY offers two soup plates. LADY MARY selects the clear and the aperture is closed. She works the punkah while the master partakes of his soup.]

CRICHTON [*who always gives praise where it is due*] An excellent soup, Polly, but still a trifle too rich.

LADY MARY Thank you

[The next course is the fish, and while it is being passed through the hutch we have a glimpse of three jealous women. LADY MARY'S movements are so deft and noiseless that any observant spectator can see that she was born to wait at table.]

CRICHTON [*unbending as he eats*]

Polly, you are a very smart girl.

LADY MARY [*brindling, but naturally gratified*] La!

CRICHTON [*smiling*] And I'm not the first you've heard it from, I'll swear.

LADY MARY [*wriggling*] Oh Gov!

CRICHTON Got any followers on the island, Polly?

LADY MARY [*tossing her head*] Certainly not.

CRICHTON I thought that perhaps John or Ernest—

LADY MARY [*tilting her nose*] I don't say that it's for want of asking.

CRICHTON [*emphatically*] I'm sure it isn't. [*Perhaps he thinks he has gone too far*] You may clear.

[Flushed with pleasure, she puts before him a bird and vegetables, sees that his beaker is filled with wine, and returns to the punkah. She would love to continue their conversation, but it is for him to decide. For a time he seems to have forgotten her.]

CRICHTON Did you lose any arrows to-day?

LADY MARY Only one in Firefly Grove

CRICHTON You were as far as that? How did you get across the Black Gorge?

LADY MARY I went across on the rope

CRICHTON Hand over hand?

LADY MARY [*swelling at the implied praise*] I wasn't in the least dizzy

CRICHTON [*moved*] You brave girl! [*He sits back in his chair a little agitated*] But never do that again

LADY MARY [*pouting*] It is such fun, Gov

CRICHTON [*decisively*] I forbid it

LADY MARY [*the little rebel*] I shall

CRICHTON [*surprised*] Polly! [*He signs to her sharply to step forward, but for a moment she holds back petulantly, and even when she does come it is less obediently than like a naughty, sulky child. Nevertheless, with the forbearance that is characteristic of the man, he addresses her with grave gentleness rather than severely*] You must do as I tell you, you know

LADY MARY [*strangely passionate*] I shan't

CRICHTON [*smiling at her fury*] We shall see. Frown at me, Polly, there you do it at once. Clench your little fists, stamp your feet, bite your ribbons— [*A student of women, or at least of this woman, he knows that she is about to do these things, and thus she seems to do them to order*] LADY MARY screws up her face like a baby and cries. He is immediately kind. You child of nature, was it cruel of me to wish to save you from harm?

LADY MARY [*drying her eyes*] I'm an ungracious wretch. Oh Gov, I don't try half hard enough to please you. I'm even wearing— [*she looks down sadly*]—when I know you prefer it

CRICHTON [*thoughtfully*] I admit I do prefer it. Perhaps I am a little old-fashioned in these matters. [*Her tears again threaten*] Ah, don't, Polly, that's nothing

LADY MARY If I could only please you, Gov

CRICHTON [*slowly*] You do please me, child, very much— [*he half rises*]—very much indeed. [*If he meant to say more he checks himself. He looks at his plate*] No more, thank you

[*The simple island meal is ended, save for the walnuts and the wine, and CRICHTON is too busy a man to linger long over them. But he is a*

stickler for etiquette, and the table is cleared charmingly, though with dispatch, before they are placed before him. LADY MARY is an artist with the crumb-brush, and there are few arts more delightful to watch. Dusk has come sharply, and she turns on the electric light. It awakens CRICHTON from a reverie in which he has been regarding her]

CRICHTON Polly, there is only one thing about you that I don't quite like. [*She looks up, making a moue, if that can be said of one who so well knows her place. He explains*] That action of the hands

LADY MARY What do I do?

CRICHTON So—like one washing them. I have noticed that the others tend to do it also. It seems odd

LADY MARY [*archly*] Oh Gov, have you forgotten?

CRICHTON What?

LADY MARY That once upon a time a certain other person did that

CRICHTON [*groping*] You mean myself? [*She nods, and he shudders*] Horrible!

LADY MARY [*afraid she has hurt him*] You haven't for a very long time. Perhaps it is natural to servants

CRICHTON That must be it. [*He rises*] Polly!

[*She looks up expectantly, but he only sighs and turns away*]

LADY MARY [*genily*] You sighed, Gov

CRICHTON Did I? I was thinking. [*He paces the room and then turns to her agitatedly, yet with control over his agitation. There is some mournfulness in his voice*] I have always tried to do the right thing on this island. Above all, Polly, I want to do the right thing by you

LADY MARY [*with shining eyes*] How we all trust you. That is your reward, Gov

CRICHTON [*who is having a fight with himself*] And now I want a greater reward. Is it fair to you? Am I playing the game? Bill Crichton would always like to play the game. If we were in England—

[*He pauses so long that she breaks in softly*]

LADY MARY We know now that we shall never see England again

CRICHTON I am thinking of two people whom neither of us has seen for a long time—Lady Mary Lasenby, and one Crichton, a butler

[*He says the last word bravely, a word he once loved, though it is the most horrible of all words to him now*]

LADY MARY That cold, haughty, insolent girl Gov, look around you and forget them both

CRICHTON I had nigh forgotten them He has had a chance, Polly,—that butler—in these two years of becoming a man, and he has tried to take it There have been many failures, but there has been some success, and with it I have let the past drop off me, and turned my back on it That butler seems a far-away figure to me now, and not myself I hail him, but we scarcely know each other If I am to bring him back it can only be done by force, for in my soul he is abhorrent to me But if I thought it best for you I'd haul him back, I swear as an honest man, I would bring him back with all his obsequious ways and deferential airs, and let you see the man you call your Gov melt forever into him who was your servant

LADY MARY [shivering] You hurt me You say these things, but you say them like a king To me it is the past that was not real

CRICHTON [*too grandly*] A king! I sometimes feel — [*For a moment the yellow light gleams in his green eyes We remember suddenly what TREHERNE and ERNEST said about his regal look He checks himself*] I say it harshly, it is so hard to say, and all the time there is another voice within me crying —

[*He stops*]
LADY MARY [*trembling but not afraid*] If it is the voice of Nature —

CRICHTON [*strongly*] I know it to be the voice of Nature

LADY MARY [*in a whisper*] Then, if you want to say it very much, Gov, please say it to Polly Lasenby

CRICHTON [*again in the grip of an idea*] A king! Polly, some people hold that the soul but leaves one human tenement for another, and so lives on through all the ages I have occasionally thought of late that, in some past existence, I may have been a king It has all come to me so naturally, not as if I had had to work it out, but—as if—I—remembered

“Or ever the knightly years were gone,
With the old world to the grave,
I was a king in Babylon,
And you were a Christian slave”

It may have been, you hear me, it may have been

LADY MARY [*who is as one fascinated*] It may have been

CRICHTON I am lord over all They

are but hewers of wood and drawers of water for me These shores are mine Why should I hesitate, I have no longer any doubt I do believe I am doing the right thing Dear Polly, I have grown to love you, are you afraid to mate with me? [*She rocks her arms, no words will come from her*]

“I was a king in Babylon,

And you were a Christian slave”

LADY MARY [*bewitched*] You are the most wonderful man I have ever known and I am not afraid [*He takes her to him reverently Presently he is seated, and she is at his feet looking up adoringly in his face As the tension relaxes, she speaks with a smile*] I want you to tell me—every woman likes to know—when was the first time you thought me nicer than the others?

CRICHTON [*who like all big men is simple*] I think a year ago We were chasing goats on the Big Slopes, and you out-distanced us all, you were the first of our party to run a goat down, I was proud of you that day

LADY MARY [*blushing with pleasure*] Oh Gov, I only did it to please you Everything I have done has been out of the desire to please you [*Suddenly anxious*] If I thought that in taking a wife from among us you were imperilling your dignity —

CRICHTON [*perhaps a little masterful*] Have no fear of that, dear I have thought it all out The wife, Polly, always takes the same position as the husband

LADY MARY But I am so unworthy It was sufficient to me that I should be allowed to wait on you at that table

CRICHTON You shall wait on me no longer At whatever table I sit, Polly, you shall soon sit there, also [*Boyishly*] Come, let us try what it will be like

LADY MARY As your servant at your feet

CRICHTON No, as my consort by my side

[*They are sitting thus when the hatch is again opened and coffee offered But LADY MARY is no longer there to receive it Her sisters peep through in consternation In vain they rattle the cup and saucer AGATHA brings the coffee to CRICHTON*]

CRICHTON [*forgetting for the moment that it is not a month hence*] Help your mistress first, girl [*Three women are bereft of speech, but he does not notice it He addresses CATHERINE vaguely*] Are you a good girl, Kitty?

CATHERINE [*when she finds her tongue*] I try to be, Gov

CRICHTON [*still more vaguely*] That's right

[*He takes command of himself again, and signs to them to sit down ERNEST comes in cheerily, but finding CRICHTON here is suddenly weak He subsides on a chair, wondering what has happened*]

CRICHTON [*surveying him*] Ernest [*ERNEST rises*] You are becoming a little slovenly in your dress, Ernest, I don't like it

ERNEST [*respectfully*] Thank you [*ERNEST sits again DADDY and TREHERNE arrive*]

CRICHTON Daddy, I want you

LORD LOAM [*with a sinking*] Is it because I forgot to clean out the dam?

CRICHTON [*encouragingly*] No, no [*He pours some wine into a goblet*] A glass of wine with you, Daddy

LORD LOAM [*hastily*] Your health, Gov

[*He is about to drink, but the master checks him*]

CRICHTON And hers Daddy, this lady has done me the honor to promise to be my wife

LORD LOAM [*astounded*] Polly!

CRICHTON [*a little perturbed*] I ought first to have asked your consent I deeply regret—but Nature, may I hope I have your approval?

LORD LOAM May you, Gov? [*Delighted*] Rather! Polly!

[*He puts his proud arms around her*]

TREHERNE We all congratulate you, Gov, most heartily

ERNEST Long life to you both, sir

[*There is much shaking of hands, all of which is sincere*]

TREHERNE When will it be, Gov?

CRICHTON [*after turning to LADY MARY, who whispers to him*] As soon as the bridal skirt can be prepared [*His manner has been most indulgent, and without the slightest sign of patronage But he knows it is best for all that he should keep his place, and that his presence hampers them*] My friends, I thank you for your good wishes, I thank you all And now, perhaps you would like me to leave you to yourselves Be joyous Let there be song and dance tonight Polly, I shall take my coffee in the Parlor—you understand

[*He retires with pleasant dignity Immediately there is a rush of two girls at LADY MARY*]

LADY MARY Oh, oh! Father, they are pinching me

LORD LOAM [*taking her under his protection*] Agatha, Catherine, never presume to pinch your sister again On the other hand, she may pinch you henceforth as much as ever she chooses

[*In the meantime TWEEENY is weeping softly, and the two are not above using her as a weapon*]

CATHERINE Poor Tweeny It's a shame

AGATHA After he had almost promised you

TWEEENY [*loyally turning on them*] No, he never did He was always honorable as could be 'Twas me as was too vulgar Don't you dare say a word again that man

ERNEST [*to LORD LOAM*] You'll get a lot of tit-bits out of this, Daddy

LORD LOAM That's what I was thinking

ERNEST [*plunged in thought*] I dare say I shall have to clean out the dam now

LORD LOAM [*heartlessly*] I dare say [*His gay old heart makes him again proclaim that he is a chucky chuck He seizes the concertina*]

TREHERNE [*eagerly*] That's the proper spirit

[*He puts his arm round CATHERINE, and in another moment they are all dancing to Daddy's music Never were people happier on an island A moment's pause is presently created by the return of CRICHTON wearing the wonderful robe of which we have already had dark mention Never has he looked more regal, never perhaps felt so regal We need not grudge him the one foible of his rule, for it is all coming to an end*]

CRICHTON [*graciously, seeing them hesitate*] No, no, I am delighted to see you all so happy Go on

TREHERNE We don't like to before you, Gov

CRICHTON [*his last order*] It is my wish

[*The merrymaking is resumed, and soon CRICHTON himself joins in the dance It is when the fun is at its fastest and most furious that all stop abruptly as if turned to stone They have heard the boom of a gun Presently they are alive again ERNEST leaps to the window*]

TREHERNE [*huskily*] It was a ship's gun [*They turn to CRICHTON for confirmation, even in that hour they turn to CRICHTON*] Gov?

CRICHTON Yes

[In another moment LADY MARY and LORD LOAM are alone]

LADY MARY [seeing that her father is unconcerned] Father, you heard

LORD LOAM [placidly] Yes, my child

LADY MARY [alarmed by his unnatural calmness] But it was a gun, father

LORD LOAM [looking an old man now, and shuddering a little] Yes—a gun—I have often heard it It's only a dream, you know, why don't we go on dancing?

[She takes his hands, which have gone cold]

LADY MARY Father Don't you see, they have all rushed down to the beach? Come

LORD LOAM Rushed down to the beach, yes, always that—I often dream it

LADY MARY Come, father, come

LORD LOAM Only a dream, my poor girl

[CRICHTON returns He is pale but firm]

CRICHTON We can see lights within a mile of the shore—a great ship

LORD LOAM A ship—always a ship

LADY MARY Father, this is no dream

LORD LOAM [looking timidly at CRICHTON] It's a dream, isn't it? There's no ship?

CRICHTON [soothing him with a touch] You are awake, Daddy, and there is a ship

LORD LOAM [clutching him] You are not deceiving me?

CRICHTON It is the truth

LORD LOAM [reeling] True?—a ship—at last!

[He goes after the others pitifully]

CRICHTON [quietly] There is a small boat between it and the island, they must have sent it ashore for water

LADY MARY Coming in?

CRICHTON No That gun must have been a signal to recall it It is going back They can't hear our cries

LADY MARY [pressing her temples] Going away So near—so near [Almost to herself] I think I'm glad

CRICHTON [cheerily] Have no fear I shall bring them back

[He goes towards the table on which is the electrical apparatus]

LADY MARY [standing on guard as it were between him and the table] What are you going to do?

CRICHTON To fire the beacons

LADY MARY Stop! [She faces him] Don't you see what it means?

CRICHTON [firmly] It means that our

life on the island has come to a natural end

LADY MARY [huskily] Gov, let the ship go

CRICHTON The old man—you saw what it means to him

LADY MARY But I am afraid

CRICHTON [adoringly] Dear Polly

LADY MARY Gov, let the ship go

CRICHTON [she clings to him, but though it is his death sentence he loosens her hold] Bill Crichton has got to play the game

[He pulls the levers Soon through the window one of the beacons is seen flaring red There is a long pause Shouting is heard ERNEST is the first to arrive]

ERNEST Polly, Gov, the boat has turned back They are English sailors, they have landed! We are rescued I tell you, rescued!

LADY MARY [wanly] Is it anything to make so great a to-do about?

ERNEST [staring] Eh?

LADY MARY Have we not been happy here?

ERNEST Happy? lord, yes

LADY MARY [catching hold of his sleeve] Ernest, we must never forget all that the Gov has done for us

ERNEST [stoutly] Forget it? The man who could forget it would be a selfish wretch and a — But I say, this makes a difference!

LADY MARY [quickly] No, it doesn't

ERNEST [his mind tottering] A mighty difference!

[The others come running in, some weeping with joy, others boisterous We see blue-jackets gazing through the window at the curious scene LORD LOAM comes accompanied by a naval officer, whom he is continually shaking by the hand]

LORD LOAM And here, sir, is our little home Let me thank you again in the names of all of us, again and again and again

OFFICER Very proud, my lord It is indeed an honor to have been able to assist so distinguished a gentleman as Lord Loam

LORD LOAM A glorious, glorious day I shall show you our other room Come, my pets Come, Crichton

[He has not meant to be cruel He does not know he has said it It is the old life that has come back to him They all go All leave CRICHTON except LADY MARY]

LADY MARY [stretching out her arms

to him] Dear Gov, I will never give you up

[There is a salt smile on his face as he shakes his head to her He lets the clock slip to the ground She will not take this for an answer, again her arms go out to him Then comes the great renunciation By an effort of will he ceases to be an erect figure, he has the humble bearing of a servant His hands come together as if he were washing them]

CRICHTON [it is the speech of his life]

My lady

[She goes away There is none to salute him now, unless we do it]

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

Some months have elapsed, and we have again the honor of waiting upon LORD LOAM in his London home It is the room of the first act, but with a new scheme of decoration, for on the walls are exhibited many interesting trophies from the island, such as skins, stuffed birds, and weapons of the chase, labelled "Shot by LORD LOAM," "HON ERNEST WOOLLEY'S Blow-pipe," etc There are also two large glass cases containing other odds and ends, including, curiously enough, the bucket in which ERNEST was first dapped, but there is no label calling attention to the incident

It is not yet time to dress for dinner, and his lordship is on a couch, hastily yet furtively cutting the pages of a new book With him are his two younger daughters and his nephew, and they also are engaged in literary pursuits, that is to say, the ladies are eagerly but furtively reading the evening papers, of which ERNEST is sitting complacently but furtively on an endless number, and doling them out as called for Note the frequent use of the word "furtive" It implies that they do not wish to be discovered by their butler, say, at their otherwise delightful task

AGATHA [reading aloud, with emphasis on the wrong words] "In conclusion, we must heartily congratulate the Hon Ernest Woolley This book of his, regarding the adventures of himself and his brave companions on a desert isle, stirs the heart like a trumpet"

[Evidently the book referred to is the one in LORD LOAM'S hands]

ERNEST [handing her a pink paper] Here is another

CATHERINE [reading] "From the first to the last of Mr Woolley's engrossing pages it is evident that he was an ideal man to be wrecked with, and a true hero" [Large-eyed] Ernest!

ERNEST [calmly] That's how it strikes them, you know Here's another one

AGATHA [reading] "There are many kindly references to the two servants who were wrecked with the family, and Mr Woolley pays the butler a glowing tribute in a footnote"

[Some one coughs uncomfortably]

LORD LOAM [who has been searching the index for the letter L] Excellent, excellent At the same time I must say, Ernest that the whole book is about yourself

ERNEST [genuinely] As the author — LORD LOAM Certainly, certainly Still you know, as a peer of the realm — [with dignity] — I think, Ernest, you might have given me one of your adventures

ERNEST I say it was you who taught us how to obtain a fire by rubbing two pieces of stick together

LORD LOAM [beaming] Do you, do you? I call that very handsome What page?

[Here the door opens, and the well-bred CRICHTON enters with the evening papers as subscribed for by the house Those we have already seen have perhaps been introduced by ERNEST up his waistcoat Every one except the intruder is immediately self-conscious, and when he withdraws there is a general sigh of relief They pounce on the new papers ERNEST evidently gets a shock from one, which he casts contemptuously on the floor]

AGATHA [more fortunate] Father, see page 81 "It was a tiger-cat," says Mr Woolley, "of the largest size Death stared Lord Loam in the face, but he never flinched"

LORD LOAM [searching his book eagerly] Page 81

AGATHA "With presence of mind only equalled by his courage, he fixed an arrow in his bow"

LORD LOAM Thank you, Ernest, thank you my boy

AGATHA "Unfortunately he missed"

LORD LOAM Eh?

AGATHA "But by great good luck I heard his cries —"

LORD LOAM My cries?

AGATHA "—and rushing forward with drawn knife, I stabbed the monster to the heart"

[LORD LOAM shuts his book with a pettish slam There might be a scene here were it not that CRICHTON reappears and goes to one of the glass cases All are at once on the alert, and his lordship is particularly sly]

LORD LOAM Anything in the papers, Catherine?

CATHERINE No, father, nothing—nothing at all

ERNEST [It pops out as of yore] The papers! The papers are guides that tell us what we ought to do, and then we don't do it

[CRICHTON having opened the glass case has taken out the bucket, and ERNEST, looking round for applause, sees him carrying it off and is undone For a moment of time he forgets that he is no longer on the island, and with a sigh he is about to follow CRICHTON and the bucket to a retired spot The door closes, and ERNEST comes to himself]

LORD LOAM [uncomfortably] I told him to take it away

ERNEST I thought — [he wipes his brow] — I shall go and dress [He goes]

CATHERINE Father, it's awful having Crichton here It's like living on tiptoe

LORD LOAM [gloomily] While he is here we are sitting on a volcano

AGATHA How mean of you! I am sure he has only stayed on with us to—help us through It would have looked so suspicious if he had gone at once

CATHERINE [revelling in the worst] But suppose Lady Brocklehurst were to get at him and pump him She's the most terrifying, suspicious old creature in England, and Crichton simply can't tell a lie

LORD LOAM My dear, that is the volcano to which I was referring [He has evidently something to communicate] It's all Mary's fault She said to me yesterday that she would break her engagement with Brocklehurst unless I told him about—you know what

[All conjure up the vision of CRICHTON]

AGATHA Is she mad?

LORD LOAM She calls it common honesty

CATHERINE Father, have you told him?

LORD LOAM [heavily] She thinks I

have, but I couldn't She's sure to find out to-night

[Unconsciously he leans on the island concertina, which he has perhaps been lately showing to an interviewer as something he made for TWEENY It squeaks, and they all jump]

CATHERINE It's like a bird of ill-omen

LORD LOAM [vindictively] I must have it taken away, it has done that twice

[LADY MARY comes in She is in evening dress Undoubtedly she meant to sail in, but she forgets, and despite her garments it is a manly entrance She is properly ashamed of herself She tries again, and has an encouraging success She indicates to her sisters that she wishes to be alone with papa]

AGATHA All right but we know what it's about Come along, Kit

[They go LADY MARY thoughtlessly sits like a boy, and again corrects herself She addresses her father, but he is in a brown study, and she seeks to draw his attention by whistling This troubles them both]

LADY MARY How horrid of me!

LORD LOAM [depressed] If you would try to remember —

LADY MARY [sighing] I do, but there are so many things to remember

LORD LOAM [sympathetically] There are — [in a whisper] Do you know, Mary, I constantly find myself secreting harpings

LADY MARY I find it so difficult to go up steps one at a time

LORD LOAM I was dining with half dozen members of our party last Thursday, Mary, and they were so eloquent that I couldn't help wondering all the time how many of their heads he would have put in the bucket

LADY MARY I use so many of his phrases And my appetite is so scandalous Father, I usually have a chop before we sit down to dinner

LORD LOAM As for my clothes—[wriggling] My dear, you can't think how irksome collars are to me nowadays

LADY MARY They can't be half such an annoyance, father, as —

[She looks dolefully at her skirt]

LORD LOAM [hurriedly] Quite so—quite so You have dressed early tonight, Mary

LADY MARY That reminds me, I had a note from Brocklehurst saying he would come a few minutes before his mother—as he wanted to have a talk with me He didn't say what about, but of course we

know [*Has lordship fidgets*] [*With feeling*] It was good of you to tell him, father Oh, it is horrible to me — [*Covering her face*] It seemed so natural at the time

LORD LOAM [*petulantly*] Never again make use of that word in this house, Mary

LADY MARY [*with an effort*] Father, Brocklehurst has been so loyal to me for these two years that I should despise myself were I to keep my—my extraordinary lapse from him Had Brocklehurst been a little less good, then you need not have told him my strange little secret

LORD LOAM [*weakly*] Polly—I mean Mary—it was all Crichton's fault, he—

LADY MARY [*with decision*] No, father, no, not a word against him though I haven't the pluck to go on with it, I can't even understand how it ever was Father, do you not still hear the surf? Do you see the curve of the beach?

LORD LOAM I have begun to forget — [*in a low voice*] But they were happy days, there was something magical about them

LADY MARY It was glamour Father, I have lived Arabian nights I have sat out a dance with the evening star But it was all in a past existence, in the days of Babylon, and I am myself again But he has been chivalrous always If the slothful, indolent creature I used to be has improved in any way, I owe it all to him I am slipping back in many ways, but I am determined not to slip back altogether—in memory of him and his island That is why I insisted on your telling Brocklehurst He can break our engagement if he chooses [*Proudly*] Mary Lasenby is going to play the game

LORD LOAM But my dear—

[*LORD BROCKLEHURST is announced*]

LADY MARY [*meaningly*] Father, dear, oughtn't you to be dressing?

LORD LOAM [*very unhappy*] The fact is—before I go—I want to say—

LORD BROCKLEHURST Loam, if you don't mind, I wish very specially to have a word with Mary before dinner

LORD LOAM But—

LADY MARY Yes, father [*She induces him to go, and thus courageously faces* LORD BROCKLEHURST to hear her fate] I am ready, George

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*who is so agitated that she ought to see he is thinking not of her but of himself*] It is a painful matter—I wish I could have spared you this, Mary

LADY MARY Please go on

LORD BROCKLEHURST In common

fairness, of course, this should be remembered, that two years had elapsed You and I had no reason to believe that we should ever meet again

[*This is more considerate than she had expected*]

LADY MARY [*softening*] I was so lost to the world, George

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*with a groan*] At the same time, the thing is utterly and absolutely inexcusable

LADY MARY [*recovering her hauteur*] Oh!

LORD BROCKLEHURST And so I have already said to mother

LADY MARY [*disdaining him*] You have told her?

LORD BROCKLEHURST Certainly, Mary, certainly, I tell mother everything

LADY MARY [*curling her lips*] And what did she say?

LORD BROCKLEHURST To tell the truth, mother rather pooh-poohed the whole affair

LADY MARY [*incredulous*] Lady Brocklehurst pooh-poohed the whole affair!

LORD BROCKLEHURST She said "Mary and I will have a good laugh over this"

LADY MARY [*outraged*] George, your mother is a hateful, depraved old woman

LORD BROCKLEHURST Mary!

LADY MARY [*turning away*] Laugh indeed, when it will always be such a pain to me

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*with strange humility*] If only you would let me bear all the pain, Mary

LADY MARY [*who is taken aback*] George, I think you are the noblest man—

[*She is touched, and gives him both her hands Unfortunately he simpers*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST She was a pretty little thing [*She stares, but he marches to his doom*] Ah, not beautiful like you I assure you it was the merest flirtation, there were a few letters, but we have got them back It was all owing to the boat being so late at Calais You see she had such large, helpless eyes

LADY MARY [*fixing him*] George, when you lunched with father to-day at the club—

LORD BROCKLEHURST I didn't He wired me that he couldn't come

LADY MARY [*with a tremor*] But he wrote you?

LORD BROCKLEHURST No

LADY MARY [*a bird singing in her breast*] You haven't seen him since?

LORD BROCKLEHURST No
*[She is saved Is he to be let off also?
 Not at all She bears down on him like
 a ship of war]*

LADY MARY George, who and what is this woman?

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[cowering]*
 She was—she is—the shame of it—a lady's-maid

LADY MARY *[properly horrified]* A what?

LORD BROCKLEHURST A lady's-maid A mere servant, Mary *[LADY MARY whirls round so that he shall not see her face]* I first met her at this house when you were entertaining the servants, so you see it was largely your father's fault

LADY MARY *[looking him up and down]* A lady's-maid?

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[degraded]*
 Her name was Fisher

LADY MARY My maid!

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[with open hands]* Can you forgive me, Mary?

LADY MARY Oh George, George!

LORD BROCKLEHURST Mother urged me not to tell you anything about it, but—

LADY MARY *[from her heart]* I am so glad you told me

LORD BROCKLEHURST You see there was nothing wrong in it

LADY MARY *[thinking perhaps of another incident]* No, indeed

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[inclined to smother again]* And she behaved awfully well She quite saw that it was because the boat was late I suppose the glamor to a girl in service of a man in high position—

LADY MARY Glamor!—yes, yes, that was it

LORD BROCKLEHURST Mother says that a girl in such circumstances is to be excused if she loses her head

LADY MARY *[impulsively]* George, I am so sorry if I said anything against your mother I am sure she is the dearest old thing

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[in calm waters at last]* Of course for women of our class she has a very different standard

LADY MARY *[grown tiny]* Of course

LORD BROCKLEHURST You see, knowing how good a woman she is herself, she was naturally anxious that I should marry some one like her That is what has made her watch your conduct so jealously, Mary

LADY MARY *[hurriedly thanking things out]* I know I—I think, George, that be-

fore your mother comes I should like to say a word to father

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[nervously]*
 About this?

LADY MARY Oh no, I shan't tell him of this About something else

LORD BROCKLEHURST And you do forgive me, Mary?

LADY MARY *[smiling on him]* Yes, yes I—I am sure the boat was very late, George

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[earnestly]*
 It really was

LADY MARY I am even relieved to know that you are not quite perfect, dear *[She rests her hands on his shoulders She has a moment of contrition]* George when we are married, we shall try to be not a entirely frivolous couple, won't we? We must endeavour to be of some little use, dear

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[the ass]*
Noblesse oblige

LADY MARY *[haunted by the phrases of a better man]* Mary Lasenby is determined to play the game, George

[Perhaps she adds to herself, "Except just this once" A kiss closes this episode of the two lovers, and soon after the departure of LADY MARY the COUNTER-ESS OF BROCKLEHURST is announced She is a very formidable old lady]

LADY BROCKLEHURST Alone, George?

LORD BROCKLEHURST Mother, I told her all, she has behaved magnificently

LADY BROCKLEHURST *[who has not shared his fears]* Silly boy *[She casts a supercilious eye on the island trophies]* So these are the wonders they brought back with them Gone away to dry her eyes I suppose?

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[proud of his mate]* She didn't cry, mother

LADY BROCKLEHURST No? *[She reflects]* You're quite right I wouldn't have cried Cold, icy Yes, that was it

LORD BROCKLEHURST *[who has not often contradicted her]* I assure you, mother, that wasn't it at all She forgave me at once

LADY BROCKLEHURST *[opening her eyes sharply to the full]* Oh!

LORD BROCKLEHURST She was awfully nice about the boat being late, she even said she was relieved to find that I wasn't quite perfect

LADY BROCKLEHURST *[pouncing]*
 She said that?

LORD BROCKLEHURST She really did

LADY BROCKLEHURST I mean I wouldn't Now if I had said that, what would have made me say it? [*Suspiciously*] George, is Mary all we think her?

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*with unexpected spirit*] If she wasn't, Mother, you would know it

LADY BROCKLEHURST Hold your tongue, boy We don't really know what happened on that island

LORD BROCKLEHURST You were reading the book all the morning

LADY BROCKLEHURST How can I be sure that the book is true?

LORD BROCKLEHURST They all talk of it as true

LADY BROCKLEHURST How do I know that they are not lying?

LORD BROCKLEHURST Why should they be?

LADY BROCKLEHURST Why shouldn't they? [*She reflects again*] If I had been wrecked on an island, I think it highly probable that I should have lied when I came back Weren't some of the servants with them?

LORD BROCKLEHURST Crichton the butler [*He is surprised to see her ring the bell*] Why, Mother, you are not going to —

LADY BROCKLEHURST Yes, I am [*Pointedly*] George, watch whether Crichton begins any of his answers to my questions with "The fact is"

LORD BROCKLEHURST Why?

LADY BROCKLEHURST Because that is usually the beginning of a lie

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*as CRICHTON opens the door*] Mother, you can't do these things in other people's houses

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*coolly, to CRICHTON*] It was I who rang [*Surveying him through her eyeglass*] So you were one of the castaways, Crichton?

CRICHTON Yes my lady

LADY BROCKLEHURST Delightful book Mr Woolley has written about your adventures [*CRICHTON bows*] Don't you think so?

CRICHTON I have not read it, my lady

LADY BROCKLEHURST Odd that they should not have presented you with a copy

LORD BROCKLEHURST Presumably Crichton is no reader

LADY BROCKLEHURST By the way, Crichton, were there any books on the island?

CRICHTON I had one, my lady—Hendley's poems

LORD BROCKLEHURST Never heard of him [*CRICHTON again bows*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*who has not heard of him either*] I think you were not the only servant wrecked?

CRICHTON There was a young woman, my lady

LADY BROCKLEHURST I want to see her [*CRICHTON bows, but remains*] Fetch her up [*He goes*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*almost standing up to his mother*] This is scandalous

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*defining her position*] I am a mother [*CATHERINE and AGATHA enter in dazzling confections and quake in secret to find themselves practically alone with LADY BROCKLEHURST*] [*Even as she greets them*] How d'you do, Catherine—Agatha? You didn't dress like this on the island, I expect! By the way, how did you dress?

[*They have thought themselves prepared, but —*]

AGATHA Not—so well, of course, but quite the same idea

[*They are relieved by the arrival of TREHERNE, who is in clerical dress*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST How do you do, Mr Treherne? There is not so much of you in the book as I had hoped

TREHERNE [*modestly*] There wasn't very much of me on the island, Lady Brocklehurst

LADY BROCKLEHURST How d'ye mean?

[*He shrugs his modest shoulders*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST I hear you have got a living, Treherne Congratulations

TREHERNE Thanks

LORD BROCKLEHURST Is it a good one?

TREHERNE So-so They are rather weak in bowling, but it's a good bit of turf

[*Confidence is restored by the entrance of ERNEST, who takes in the situation promptly, and, of course, knows he is a match for any old lady*]

ERNEST [*with ease*] How do you do, Lady Brocklehurst

LADY BROCKLEHURST Our brilliant author!

ERNEST [*impervious to satire*] Oh, I don't know

LADY BROCKLEHURST It is as engrossing, Mr Woolley, as if it were a work of fiction

ERNEST [*suddenly uncomfortable*] Thanks, awfully [*Recovering*] The fact is —

[*He is puzzled by seeing the Brocklehurst family exchange meaning looks*]

CATHERINE [*to the rescue*] Lady Brocklehurst, Mr Treherne and I—we are engaged

AGATHA And Ernest and I

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*grimly*] I see, my dears, thought it wise to keep the island in the family

[*An awkward moment this for the entrance of LORD LOAM and LADY MARY, who, after a private talk upstairs, are feeling happy and secure*]

LORD LOAM [*with two hands for his distinguished guest*] Aha! ha, ha! younger than any of them, Emily

LADY BROCKLEHURST Flatterer [*To LADY MARY*] You seem in high spirits, Mary

LADY MARY [*gaily*] I am

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*with a significant glance at LORD BROCKLEHURST*] After —

LADY MARY I—I mean The fact is —

[*Again that disconcerting glance between the countess and her son*]

LORD LOAM [*humorously*] She hears wedding bells, Emily, ha, ha!

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*coldly*] Do you, Mary? Can't say I do, but I'm hard of hearing

LADY MARY [*instantly her match*] If you don't, Lady Brocklehurst, I'm sure I don't

LORD LOAM [*nervously*] Tut, tut. Seen our curios from the island, Emily, I should like you to examine them

LADY BROCKLEHURST Thank you, Henry I am glad you say that, for I have just taken the liberty of asking two of them to step upstairs

[*There is an uncomfortable silence, which the entrance of CRICHTON and TWEENY does not seem to dissipate. CRICHTON is impenetrable, but TWEENY hangs back in fear*]

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*stoutly*] Loam, I have no hand in this

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*undisturbed*] Pooh, what have I done? You always begged me to speak to the servants, Henry, and I merely wanted to discover whether the views you used to hold about equality were adopted on the island, it seemed a splendid opportunity, but Mr Woolley has not a word on the subject

[*All eyes turn on ERNEST*]

ERNEST [*with confidence*] The fact is — [*The fatal words again*]

LORD LOAM [*not quite certain what he is to assure her of*] I assure you, Emily —

LADY MARY [*cold as steel*] Father, nothing whatever happened on the island of which I, for one, am ashamed, and I hope Crichton will be allowed to answer Lady Brocklehurst's questions

LADY BROCKLEHURST To be sure There's nothing to make a fuss about, and we're a family party [*To CRICHTON*] Now, truthfully, my man

CRICHTON [*calmly*] I promise that, my lady

[*Some hearts sink, the hearts that could never understand a CRICHTON*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*sharply*] Well, were you all equal on the island?

CRICHTON No, my lady I think I may say there was as little equality there as elsewhere

LADY BROCKLEHURST All the social distinctions were preserved?

CRICHTON As at home, my lady

LADY BROCKLEHURST The servants?

CRICHTON They had to keep their place

LADY BROCKLEHURST Wonderful How was it managed? [*With an inspiration*] You, girl, tell me that?

[*Can there be a more critical moment?*]

TWEENY [*in agony*] If you please, my lady, it was all the Gov's doing

[*They give themselves up for lost. LORD LOAM tries to sink out of sight*]

CRICHTON In the regrettable slang of the servants' hall, my lady, the master is usually referred to as the Gov

LADY BROCKLEHURST I see [*She turns to LORD LOAM*] You —

LORD LOAM [*reappearing*] Yes, I understand that is what they call me

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*to CRICHTON*] You didn't even take your meals with the family?

CRICHTON No, my lady, I dined apart [*Is all safe?*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*alas*] You, girl, also? Did you dine with Crichton?

TWEENY [*scared*] No, your ladyship

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*fastening on her*] With whom?

TWEENY I took my bit of supper with —with Daddy and Polly and the rest

[*Væ victis*]
ERNEST [*leaping into the breach*] Dear old Daddy—he was our monkey You remember our monkey, Agatha?

AGATHA Rather! What a funny old darling he was

CATHERINE [*thus encouraged*] And do't you think Polly was the sweetest little parrot, Mary?

LADY BROCKLEHURST Ah! I understand, animals you had domesticated?

LORD LOAM [*heavily*] Quite so—quite so

LADY BROCKLEHURST The servants' teas that used to take place here once a month—

CRICHTON They did not seem natural on the island, my lady and were discontinued by the Gov's orders

LORD BROCKLEHURST A clear proof, Loam, that they were a mistake here

LORD LOAM [*seeing the opportunity for a diversion*] I admit it frankly I abandon them Emily, as the result of our experiences on the island, I think of going over to the Tones

LADY BROCKLEHURST I am delighted to hear it

LORD LOAM [*expanding*] Thank you, Crichton, thank you, that is all

[*He motions to them to go, but the time is not yet*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST One moment [*There is a universal but stifled groan*] Young people, Crichton, will be young people, even on an island, now, I suppose there was a certain amount of—shall we say sentimentalizing, going on?

CRICHTON Yes, my lady, there was

LORD BROCKLEHURST [*ashamed*] Mother!

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*disregarding him*] Which gentleman? [*To TWEENY*] You, girl, tell me

TWEENY [*confused*] If you please, my lady—

ERNEST [*hurriedly*] The fact is—

[*He is checked as before, and probably says "D—n" to himself, but he has saved the situation*]

TWEENY [*gasping*] It was him—Mr Ernest, your ladyship

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*counsel for the prosecution*] With which lady?

AGATHA I have already told you, Lady Brocklehurst, that Ernest and I—

LADY BROCKLEHURST Yes, now, but you were two years on the island [*Looking at LADY MARY*] Was it this lady?

TWEENY No, your ladyship

LADY BROCKLEHURST Then I don't

care which of the others it was [*TWEENY gurgles*] Well, I suppose that will do

LORD BROCKLEHURST Do! I hope you are ashamed of yourself, mother [*To CRICHTON, who is going*] You are an excellent fellow, Crichton, and if, after we are married, you ever wish to change your place, come to us

LADY MARY [*losing her head for the only time*] Oh no, impossible

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*at once suspicious*] Why impossible? [*LADY MARY cannot answer, or perhaps she is too proud*] Do you see why it should be impossible, my man?

[*He can make or mar his unworthy MARY now Have you any doubt of him?*]

CRICHTON Yes, my lady I had not told you, my lord, but as soon as your lordship is suited I wish to leave service

[*They are all immensely relieved, except poor TWEENY*]

TREHERNE [*the only curious one*] What will you do, Crichton?

[*CRICHTON shrugs his shoulders "God knows," it may mean*]

CRICHTON Shall I withdraw, my lord?

[*He withdraws without a tremor, TWEENY accompanying him They can all breathe again, the thunderstorm is over*]

LADY BROCKLEHURST [*thankful to have made herself unpleasant*] Horrid of me, wasn't it? But if one wasn't disagreeable now and again, it would be horribly tedious to be an old woman He will soon be yours, Mary, and then—think of the opportunities you will have of being disagreeable to me On that understanding, my dear, don't you think we might—?

[*Their cold lips meet*]

LORD LOAM [*vaguely*] Quite so—quite so

[*CRICHTON announces dinner, and they file out LADY MARY stays behind a moment and impulsively holds out her hand*]

LADY MARY To wish you every dear happiness

CRICHTON [*an enigma to the last*] The same to you, my lady

LADY MARY Do you despise me, Crichton? [*The man who could never tell a lie makes no answer*] You are the best man among us

CRICHTON On an island, my lady, perhaps, but in England, no

LADY MARY Then there's something wrong with England

CRICHTON My lady, not even from
you can I listen to a word against England

LADY MARY Tell me one thing you
have not lost your courage?

CRICHTON No, my lady

[*She goes He turns out the lights*]

THE END

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THE SILVER BOX
(1906)

BY
JOHN GALSWORTHY

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JOHN BARTHWICK, M P, *a wealthy Liberal*
MRS BARTHWICK, *his wife*
JACK BARTHWICK, *their son*
ROPER, *their solicitor*
MRS JONES, *their charwoman*
MARLOW, *their manservant*
WHEELER, *their maidservant*
JONES, *the stranger within their gates*
MRS SEDDON, *a landlady*
SNOW, *a detective*
A POLICE MAGISTRATE
AN UNKNOWN LADY, *from beyond*
TWO LITTLE GIRLS, *homeless*
LIVENS, *their father*
A RELIEVING OFFICER
A MAGISTRATE'S CLERK
AN USHER
POLICEMEN, CLERKS, AND OTHERS

TIME *The present* The action of the first two Acts takes place on Easter Tuesday, the action of the third on Easter Wednesday week

ACT I SCENE I *Rockingham Gate John Barthwick's dining-room*

Scene II *The same*

Scene III *The same*

ACT II SCENE I *The Jones's lodgings, Merthyr Street*

Scene II *John Barthwick's dining-room*

ACT III *A London police court*

JOHN GALSWORTHY

JOHN GALSWORTHY was born in 1867 in Surrey, England, the son of a prosperous London lawyer. Like Robert Browning, Galsworthy was fortunately born—his parents were well-to-do, humane, and intellectual, his home life and childhood were quite happy, and he never knew want and discord. He was schooled at Harrow and Oxford and trained for the law, although he disliked the profession and practised very little. (In his fiction and plays, however, are many barristers and court room scenes.) He traveled widely, but a sharp social conscience and an active mind prevented his drifting through life a mere traveler and a "man about town," and at the age of twenty-eight he discovered his great talent—writing. He achieved high eminence in both fiction and drama. The long series of Forsyte novels constitutes a national epic of modern England, a saga of sweeping significance as well as of deep human interest. A very successful and popular author, Galsworthy was able to give huge sums to charities, and he devoted much time to such creditable hobbies as prison reform, more humane methods of animal slaughter, etc. During the war he served as a masseur in a French convalescent hospital. He refused a knighthood, but accepted the Order of Merit and in 1932 received the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died in London in 1933.

Galsworthy's plays deal with the entanglement of personality in the meshes of modern society, so much so that he has been accused of being more concerned with types and social movements than with human nature. But he asserts that "to deal austere and naturalistically with the life of one's day is to find the human being so involved in environment that he cannot be dissociated." He maintains that his characters necessarily are "part of the warp and woof of a complicated society, in which the individual is as much netted-in by encircling fates as ever were the creations of Greek dramatists." His literary method in the early plays was that of the Continental naturalists—new in England. He aimed "to set before the public no cut-and-dried codes, but the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, *but not distorted*, by the dramatist's outlook, set down without fear, favor, or prejudice, leaving the public to put down such poor moral as nature may afford. This method requires a certain detachment." Galsworthy's "detachment" is famous, but his impartiality is largely a myth. He tries to be scrupulously fair (note his refusal to "stack the cards" in *The Silver Box*, *Justice*, *Strife*, and *Loyalties*), but his sympathy with the underdog and his white anger at intolerance and cruelty are never concealed. Although Galsworthy was influential with Bernard Shaw and Granville-Barker in breaking down British resistance to the modern drama with "a spire of meaning," it is noteworthy that commercially the most successful of Galsworthy's plays were the less intellectual *Escape* and *Old English*.

Galsworthy served no period of apprenticeship as a dramatist. His first play, *The Silver Box* (1906), is as mature and sure as any he was to write later. *Strife* (1909) is one of the great modern tragedies— austere, ironical, static and yet exciting. Ostensibly a play concerned with capital and labor, it deals primarily with the conflict of deep human emotions and instincts. *Justice* (1910) is the most poignant and at the same time the most nearly propagandist of his plays—the painful story of the crushing of a weakling caught in the impersonal machinery of the law. As a direct result of the production of *Justice* certain prison reforms were effected in England. *The Pigeon* (1912), a tragic-comic fantasy, shows

the futility of unintelligent charity and the chilling heartlessness of an official variety, but offers no practical solution for this oldest of social problems *The Eldest Son* (1912) appeared in the same year as Stanley Houghton's celebrated *Hindle Wakes*. Both have the same cynically amusing theme—what is sauce for the goose is not always sauce for the gander. In *The Mob* (1914—significant date!) a rational and benevolent individual is destroyed by a hostile, war-crazed society. In *The Skin Game* (1920) an aristocrat is engaged in a feud with a vulgar parvenu and discovers that he is coarsened and cheapened by the fight. *Loyalties* (1922) is a dramatic answer to the question, How far should *esprit de corps* or loyalties to our group lead us to defend a wrong-doer in the group? *Old English* (1924) is an amusing character study, and *Escape* (1920), employing the technique of the motion picture, follows an escaped convict from one hiding place to another. Galsworthy was fortunate in the casting of his plays—Ethel Barrymore in *The Silver Box*, John Barrymore (before he “sold his birthright for a yacht”) in *Justice*, Leslie Howard in *Escape*, George Arliss in *Old English*, etc. Because of their slight sex interest and unromantic endings most of his plays have failed to attract the cinema industry.

The Silver Box is called by its author a “social comedy,” but it is comic only in the irony of its central theme and in the satirical portraits of the bogus Liberal, his unscrupulous wife, and his good-for-nothing son. For poor Mrs. Jones and her children it is a “social tragedy,” for in spite of complete innocence they are the victims of a horrible, within-the-law miscarriage of justice. *The Silver Box* illustrates all of Galsworthy's theories of drama. It is painstakingly fair, without heroes and villains, the real criminals are the social and judicial system, i.e., the audience—that is why the play makes its audience or reader uncomfortable. It has restraint and under-expression, both in dialogue and action. Galsworthy once wrote, “It might be said of Shaw's plays that he creates characters who express feelings which they have not got [*sic*]. It might be said of mine, that I create characters who have feelings which they cannot express.” Galsworthy knows the dramatic value of suggestion, pantomime, fragmentary remarks. The closing line of *The Silver Box* is a characteristic use of restraint and understatement, powerful in the theatre. The play marks one of the earliest successful applications of the extreme naturalistic method in English drama. The author succeeds in creating “such an illusion of actual life passing on the stage as to compel the spectator for the moment to lose all sense of artifice, to think, talk, and move with the people he sees thinking, talking, and moving in front of him.” Here, too, are his pity and indignation, his sharp vision and deep sensitiveness—his avoidance of rhetoric and turgidity. In *The Silver Box* Galsworthy the creative artist and Galsworthy the social historian are at their best, and the fusion is successful.

Note that the play begins with a soliloquy—supposedly outlawed from realistic drama. Is it plausible here? Is the crying of the child at the end of Act II a vulgar touch, a gratuitous bit of sentimentality, or is it dramatically sound and justifiable? Does the judge conduct the trial in a fair manner? (Galsworthy later took legal counsel before he wrote the trial scene in *Justice*.) Like all good plays, *The Silver Box* does not end with the final curtain. What becomes of Mrs. Jones? Does Barthwick make an attempt to help her?

THE SILVER BOX

ACT I

SCENE I—*The curtain rises on the BARTH-WICKS' dining room, large, modern, and well furnished, the window curtains drawn. Electric light is burning. On the large round dining table is set out a tray with whisky, a syphon, and a silver cigarette-box. It is past midnight.*

A fumbling is heard outside the door. It is opened suddenly, JACK BARTH-WICK seems to fall into the room. He stands holding by the doorknob, staring before him, with a beatific smile. He is in evening dress and opera hat, and carries in his hand a sky-blue velvet lady's reticule. His boyish face is freshly colored and clean-shaven. An overcoat is hanging on his arm.

JACK Hello! I've got home all right—
[Defiantly] Who says I sh'd never 've opened th' door without 'sistance. [He staggers in, fumbling with the reticule. A lady's handkerchief and purse of crimson silk fall out.] Serve her joll' well right—everything droppin' out. Th' cat I've scored her off—I've got her bag. [He swings the reticule.] Serves her joll' well right. [He takes a cigarette out of the silver box and puts it in his mouth.] Never gave tha' fellow anything! [He hunts through all his pockets and pulls a shilling out, it drops and rolls away. He looks for it.] Beastly shilling! [He looks again.] Base ingratitude! Absolutely nothing. [He laughs.] Mus' tell him I've got absolutely nothing.

[He lurches through the door and down a corridor, and presently returns, followed by JONES, who is advanced in liquor. JONES, about thirty years of age, has hollow cheeks, black circles around his eyes, and rusty clothes. He looks as though he might be unemployed, and enters in a hang-dog manner.]

JACK Sh! sh! sh! Don't you make a noise, whatever you do. Shu' the door, an' have a drink. [Very solemnly] You helped me to open the door—I've got nothin' for you. This is my house. My father's name's Barthwick, he's Member of Parliament—

Liberal Member of Parliament. I've told you that before. Have a drink! [He pours out whisky and drinks it up.] I'm not drunk— [Subsiding on a sofa.] Tha's all right. Wha's your name? My name's Barthwick, so's my father's, I'm a Liberal too—wha're you?

JONES [in a thick, sardonic voice] I'm a bloomin' Conservative. My name's Jones. My wife works 'ere, she's the char, she works 'ere.

JACK Jones? [He laughs.] There's 'nother Jones at College with me. I'm not a Socialist myself, I'm a Liberal—there's ve-hill difference, because of the principles of the Lib—Liberal Party. We're all equal before the law—tha's rot, tha's silly. [Laughs.] Wha' was I about to say? Give me some whisky. [JONES gives him the whisky he desires, together with a squirt of syphon.] Wha' I was goin' tell you was—I've had a row with her. [He waves the reticule.] Have a drink, Jones—sh'd never have got in without you—tha's why I'm giving you a drink. Don' care who knows I've scored her off. Th' cat. [He throws his feet up on the sofa.] Don' you make a noise, whatever you do. You pour out a drink—make yourself good long, long drink—you take cigarette—you take everything you like. Sh'd never have got in without you. [Closing his eyes.] You're a Tory—you're a Tory Socialist. I'm a Liberal myself—have a drink—I'm an excel'nt chap.

[His head drops back. He, smiling, falls asleep, and JONES stands looking at him, then snatching up JACK'S glass, he drinks it off. He picks the reticule from off JACK'S shirt-front, holds it to the light, and smells at it.]

JONES Been on the tiles and brought 'ome some of yer cat's fur.

[He stuffs it into JACK'S breast pocket.] JACK [murmuring] I've scored you off! You cat!

[JONES looks around him furtively, he pours out whisky and drinks it. From the silver box he takes a cigarette, puffs at it, and drinks more whisky. There is no sobriety left in him.]

JONES Fat lot o' things they've got

'ere [*He sees the crimson purse lying on the floor*] More cat's fur Puss, puss! [*He fingers it, drops it on the tray, and looks at JACK*] Calf! Fat calf! [*He sees his own presentment in a mirror Lifting his hands, with fingers spread, he stares at it, then looks again at JACK, clenching his fist as if to batter in his sleeping, smiling face Suddenly he tilts the rest of the whisky into the glass and drinks it With cunning glee he takes the silver box and purse and pockets them*] I'll score you off too, that's wot I'll do!

[*He gives a little snarling laugh and lurches to the door His shoulder rubs against the switch, the light goes out There is a sound as of a closing outer door*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE CURTAIN RISES AGAIN AT ONCE

ACT II

SCENE II—*In the BARTHWICKS' dining room JACK is still asleep, the morning light is coming through the curtains The time is half-past eight WHEELER, brisk person, enters with a dust-pan, and MRS JONES more slowly with a scuttle*

WHEELER [*drawing the curtains*] That precious husband of yours was round for you after you'd gone yesterday, Mrs Jones Wanted your money for drink, I suppose He hargs about the corner here half the time I saw him outside the "Goat and Bells" when I went to the post last night If I were you I wouldn't live with him I wouldn't live with a man that raised his hand to me I wouldn't put up with it Why don't you take your children and leave him? If you put up with 'im it'll only make him worse I never can see why, because a man's married you, he should knock you about

MRS JONES [*slim dark-eyed, and dark-haired, oval-faced, and with a smooth, soft, even voice, her manner patient, her way of talking quite impersonal, she wears a blue linen dress, and boots with holes*] It was nearly two last night before he come home, and he wasn't himself He made me get up, and he knocked me about, he didn't seem to know *what* he was saying or doing Of course I *would* leave him, but I'm really afraid of what he'd do to me He's such a violent man when he's not himself

WHEELER Why don't you get him locked up? You'll never have any peace until you get him locked up If I were you I'd go to the police court to-morrow That's what I would do

MRS JONES Of course I ought to go, because he does treat me so badly when he's not himself But you see, Bettina, he has a very hard time—he's been out of work two months, and it preys upon his mind When he's in work he behaves himself much better It's when he's out of work that he's so violent

WHEELER Well, if you won't take any steps you'll never get rid of him

MRS JONES Of course it's very wearing to me, I don't get any sleep at nights And it's not as if I were getting help from him, because I have to do for the children and all of us And he throws such dreadful things up at me, talks of my having men to follow me about Such a thing never happens, no man ever speaks to me And of course it's just the other way It's what he does that's wrong and makes me so unhappy And then he's always threatening to cut my throat if I leave him It's all the drink, and things preying on his mind, he's not a bad man really Sometimes he'll speak quite kind to me, but I've stood so much from him, I don't feel it in me to speak kind back, but just keep myself to myself And he's all right with the children, too, except when he's not himself

WHEELER You mean when he's drunk, the beauty

MRS JONES Yes [*Without change of voice*] There's the young gentleman asleep on the sofa

[*They both look silently at JACK*]

MRS JONES [*at last, in her soft voice*] He doesn't look quite himself

WHEELER He's a young limb, that's what he is It's my belief he was tipsy last night, like your husband It's another kind of bein' out of work that sets him to drink I'll go and tell Marlow This is his job

[*She goes*]

[*MRS JONES, upon her knees, begins a gentle sweeping*]

JACK [*waking*] Who's there? What is it?

MRS JONES It's me, sir, Mrs Jones

JACK [*sitting up and looking round*] Where is it—what—time is it?

MRS JONES It's getting on for nine o'clock, sir

JACK For nine! Why—what! [*Rising and loosening his tongue, putting hand to his head, and staring hard at MRS JONES*] Look here, you, Mrs—Mrs

Jones.—don't you say you caught me asleep here

MRS JONES No, sir, of course I won't, sir

JACK It's quite an accident, I don't know how it happened I must have forgotten to go to bed It's a queer thing I've got a most beastly headache Mind you don't say anything, Mrs Jones

[*Goes out and passes MARLOW in the doorway MARLOW is young and quiet, he is clean-shaven, and his hair is brushed high from his forehead in a coxcomb Incidentally a butler, he is first a man He looks at MRS JONES, and smiles a private smile*]

MARLOW Not the first time, and won't be the last Looked a bit dicky, eh, Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES He didn't look quite himself Of course I didn't take notice

MARLOW You're used to them How's your old man?

MRS JONES [*softly as throughout*] Well, he was very bad last night, he didn't seem to know what he was about He was very late, and he was most abusive But now, of course, he's asleep

MARLOW That's his way of finding a job, eh?

MRS JONES As a rule, Mr Marlow, he goes out early every morning looking for work, and sometimes he comes in fit to drop—and of course I can't say he doesn't try to get it, because he does Trade's very bad [*She stands quite still, her pan and brush before her, at the beginning and the end of long vistas of experience, traversing them with her impersonal eye*] But he's not a good husband to me—last night he hit me, and he was so dreadfully abusive

MARLOW Bank 'ohday, eh! He's too fond of the "Goat and Bells," that's what's the matter with him I see him at the corner late every night He hangs about

MRS JONES He gets to feeling very low walking about all day after work, and being refused so often, and then when he gets a drop in him it goes to his head But he shouldn't treat his wife as he treats me Sometimes I've had to go and walk about at night when he wouldn't let me stay in the room, but he's sorry for it afterwards And he hangs about after me, he waits for me in the street, and I don't think he ought to, because I've always been a good wife to him And I tell him Mrs Barthwick wouldn't like him coming about the place But that only makes him angry, and he says dreadful things about the

gentry Of course it was through me that he first lost his place, through his not treating me right, that's made him bitter against the gentry He had a very good place as groom in the country, but it made such a stir, because of course he didn't treat me right

MARLOW Got the sack?

MRS JONES Yes, his employer said he couldn't keep him, because there was a great deal of talk, and he said it was such a bad example But it's very important for me to keep my work here, I have the three children, and I don't want him to come about after me in the streets, and make a disturbance as he sometimes does

MARLOW [*holding up the empty decanter*] Not a drain! Next time he hits you get a witness and go down to the court—

MRS JONES Yes, I think I've made up my mind I think I ought to

MARLOW That's right Where's the ciga—? [*He searches for the silver box, he looks at MRS JONES who is sweeping on her hands and knees, he checks himself and stands reflecting From the tray he picks two half-smoked cigarettes, and reads the name on them*] Nestor—where the deuce—?

[*With a meditative air he looks again at MRS JONES, and, taking up JACK'S overcoat, he searches in the pockets WHEELER, with a tray of breakfast things, comes in*]

MARLOW [*aside to WHEELER*] Have you seen the cigarette-box?

WHEELER No

MARLOW Well, it's gone I put it on the tray last night And he's been smoking [*Showing her the ends of cigarettes*] It's not in these pockets He can't have taken it upstairs this morning! Have a good look in his room when he comes down Who's been in here?

WHEELER Only me and Mrs Jones

MRS JONES I've finished here, shall I do the drawing-room now?

WHEELER [*looking at her doubtfully*] Have you seen— Better do the boudwower first

[*MRS JONES goes out with pan and brush MARLOW and WHEELER look each other in the face*]

MARLOW It'll turn up

WHEELER [*hesitating*] You don't think she— [*Nodding at the door*]

MARLOW [*stoutly*] I don't—I never believes anything of anybody

WHEELER But the master'll have to be told

MARLOW You wait a bit, and see if it don't turn up Suspicion's no business of ours I set my mind against it

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE CURTAIN RISES AGAIN AT ONCE

SCENE III—*BARTHWICK and MRS BARTHWICK are seated at the breakfast table He is a man of between fifty and sixty, quietly important, with a bald forehead, and prince-nez, and the "Times" in his hand She is a lady of nearly fifty, well dressed, with greyish hair, good features, and a decided manner They face each other*

BARTHWICK [*from behind his paper*] The Labor man has got in at the by-election for Barnside, my dear

MRS BARTHWICK Another Labor? I can't think what on earth the country is about

BARTHWICK I predicted it It's not a matter of vast importance

MRS BARTHWICK Not? How can you take it so calmly, John? To me it's simply outrageous And there you sit, you Liberals, and pretend to encourage these people!

BARTHWICK [*frowning*] The representation of all parties is necessary for any proper reform, for any proper social policy

MRS BARTHWICK I've no patience with your talk of reform—all that nonsense about social policy We know perfectly well what it is they want, they want things for themselves These Socialists and Labor men are an absolutely selfish set of people They have no sense of patriotism, like the upper classes, *they simply want what we've got*

BARTHWICK Want what we've got! [*He stares into space*] My dear, what are you talking about? [*With a contortion*] I'm no alarmist

MRS BARTHWICK Cream? Quite uneducated men! Wait until they begin to tax our investments I'm convinced that when they once get a chance they will tax everything—they've no feeling for the country You Liberals and Conservatives, you're all alike, you don't see an inch before your noses You've no imagination, not a scrap of imagination between you You ought to join hands and nip it in the bud

BARTHWICK You're talking nonsense! How is it possible for Liberals and Conservatives to join hands, as you call it? That shows how absurd it is for women—

Why, the very essence of a Liberal is to trust in the people!

MRS BARTHWICK Now John, eat your breakfast As if there were any real difference between you and the Conservatives All the upper classes have the same interests to protect, and the same principles [*Calmly*] Oh! you're sitting upon a volcano, John

BARTHWICK What!

MRS BARTHWICK I read a letter in the paper yesterday I forget the man's name, but it made the whole thing perfectly clear You don't look things in the face

BARTHWICK Indeed! [*Heavily*] I am a Liberal! Drop the subject, please!

MRS BARTHWICK Toast? I quite agree what this man says Education is simply running the lower classes It unsettles them, and that's the worst thing for us all I see an enormous difference in the manner of servants

BARTHWICK [*with suspicious emphasis*] I welcome any change that will lead to something better [*He opens a letter*] H'm! This is that affair of Master Jack's again "High Street, Oxford Sir, We have received Mr John Barthwick, Senior's, draft for forty pounds!" Oh! The letter's to him! "We now enclose the cheque you cashed with us, which, as we stated in our previous letter, was not met on presentation at your bank We are, Sir, yours obediently, Moss and Sons, Tailors" H'm! [*Staring at the cheque*] A pretty business altogether! The boy might have been prosecuted

MRS BARTHWICK Come, John, you know Jack didn't mean anything, he only thought he was overdrawing I still think his bank ought to have cashed that cheque They must know your position

BARTHWICK [*replacing in the envelope the letter and the cheque*] Much good that would have done him in a court of law

[*He stops as JACK comes in, fastening his waistcoat and slouching a razor cut upon his chin*]

JACK [*sitting down between them, and speaking with an artificial joviality*] Sorry I'm late [*He looks lugubriously at the dishes*] Tea, please, mother Any letters for me? [*Barthwick hands the letter to him*] But look here, I say, this has been opened! I do wish you wouldn't—

BARTHWICK [*touching the envelope*] I suppose I'm entitled to this name

JACK [*sulkily*] Well, I can't help having your name, father! [*He reads the letter, and mutters*] Brutes!

BARTHWICK [*eyeing him*] You don't deserve to be so well out of that

JACK Haven't you ragged me enough, dad?

MRS BARTHWICK Yes, John, let Jack have his breakfast

BARTHWICK If you hadn't had me to come to, where would you have been? It's the merest accident—suppose you had been the son of a poor man or a clerk. Obtaining money with a cheque you knew your bank could not meet. It might have ruined you for life. I can't see what's to become of you if these are your principles. I never did anything of the sort myself

JACK I expect you always had lots of money. If you've got plenty of money, of course—

BARTHWICK On the contrary, I had not your advantages. My father kept me very short of money

JACK How much had you, dad?

BARTHWICK It's not material. The question is, do you feel the gravity of what you did?

JACK I don't know about the gravity. Of course, I'm very sorry if you think it was wrong. Haven't I said so! I should never have done it at all if I hadn't been so jolly hard up

BARTHWICK How much of that forty pounds have you got left, Jack?

JACK [*hesitating*] I don't know—not much

BARTHWICK How much?

JACK [*desperately*] I haven't got any

BARTHWICK What?

JACK I know I've got the most beastly headache

[*He leans his head on his hand*]

MRS BARTHWICK Headache? My dear boy! Can't you eat any breakfast?

JACK [*drawing in his breath*] Too jolly bad!

MRS BARTHWICK I'm so sorry. Come with me, dear, I'll give you something that will take it away at once

[*They leave the room, and BARTHWICK, tearing up the letter, goes to the fireplace and puts the pieces in the fire. While he is doing this MARLOW comes in, and looking round him, is about quietly to withdraw*]

BARTHWICK What's that? What d' you want?

MARLOW I was looking for Mr John, sir

BARTHWICK What d' you want Mr John for?

MARLOW [*with hesitation*] I thought I should find him here, sir

BARTHWICK [*suspiciously*] Yes, but what do you want him for?

MARLOW [*offhandedly*] There's a lady called—asked to speak to him for a minute, sir

BARTHWICK A lady, at this time in the morning. What sort of a lady?

MARLOW [*without expression in his voice*] I can't tell, sir, no particular sort. She might be after charity. She might be a Sister of Mercy, I should think, sir

BARTHWICK Is she dressed like one?

MARLOW No, sir, she's in plain clothes, sir

BARTHWICK Didn't she say what she wanted?

MARLOW No, sir

BARTHWICK Where did you leave her?

MARLOW In the hall, sir

BARTHWICK In the hall? How do you know she's not a thief—not got designs on the house?

MARLOW No, sir I don't fancy so, sir. BARTHWICK Well, show her in here, I'll see her myself

[*MARLOW goes out with a private gesture of dismay. He soon returns, ushering in a young pale lady with dark eyes and pretty figure, in a modish, black, but rather shabby dress, a black and white trimmed hat with a bunch of Parma violets wrongly placed, and fuzzy-spotted veil. At the sight of MR BARTHWICK she exhibits every sign of nervousness. MARLOW goes out*]

UNKNOWN LADY Oh! but—I beg pardon—there's some mistake—I—

[*She turns to fly*]

BARTHWICK Whom did you want to see, madam?

UNKNOWN [*stopping and looking back*] It was Mr John Barthwick I wanted to see

BARTHWICK I am John Barthwick, madam. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?

UNKNOWN Oh! I—I don't—

[*She drops her eyes. BARTHWICK scrutinizes her, and purses his lips*]

BARTHWICK It was my son, perhaps, you wished to see?

UNKNOWN [*quickly*] Yes, of course, it's your son

BARTHWICK May I ask whom I have the pleasure of speaking to?

UNKNOWN [*appeal and hardness upon her face*] My name is—oh! it doesn't matter—I don't want to make any fuss. I just want to see your son for a minute. [*Boldly*] In fact, I must see him

BARTHWICK [*controlling his uneasiness*] My son is not very well. If necessary, no doubt I could attend to the matter, be so kind as to let me know—

UNKNOWN Oh! but I *must* see him—I've come on purpose— [*She bursts out nervously*] I don't want to make any fuss, but the fact is, last—last night your son took away—he took away my— [*She stops*]

BARTHWICK [*severely*] Yes, madam, what?

UNKNOWN He took away my—my reticule

BARTHWICK Your ret—?

UNKNOWN I don't care about the reticule, it's not *that* I want—I'm sure I don't want to make any fuss— [*her face is quivering*]—but—but—all my money was in it!

BARTHWICK In what—in what?

UNKNOWN In my purse, in the reticule. It was a crimson silk purse. Really, I wouldn't have come—I don't want to make any fuss. But I must get my money back—mustn't I?

BARTHWICK Do you tell me that my son—?

UNKNOWN Oh! well, you see, he wasn't quite—I mean he was—

[*She smiles mesmerically*]

BARTHWICK I beg your pardon

UNKNOWN [*stamping her foot*] Oh! don't you see—tipsy! We had a quarrel

BARTHWICK [*scandalized*] How? Where?

UNKNOWN [*defiantly*] At my place. We'd had supper at the — and your son—

BARTHWICK [*pressing the bell*] May I ask you how you knew this house? Did he give you his name and address?

UNKNOWN [*glancing sidelong*] I got it out of his overcoat

BARTHWICK [*sardonically*] Oh! you got it out of his overcoat. And may I ask if my son will know you by daylight?

UNKNOWN Know me? I should jolly — I mean, of course he will!

[*MARLOW comes in*]

BARTHWICK Ask Mr. John to come down. [*MARLOW goes out, and BARTHWICK walks uneasily about*] And how long have you enjoyed his acquaintance-ship?

UNKNOWN Only since—only since Good Friday

BARTHWICK I am at a loss—I repeat I am at a loss—

[*He glances at this unknown lady, who stands with eyes cast down, twisting her hands. And suddenly JACK ap-*

pears. He stops at seeing who is here, and the unknown lady hysterically giggles. There is a silence]

BARTHWICK [*portentously*] This young—er—lady says that last night—I think you said it was last night, madam—you took away—

UNKNOWN [*impulsively*] My reticule, and all my money was in a crimson silk purse

JACK Reticule [*Looking round for any chance to get away*] I don't know anything about it

BARTHWICK [*sharply*] Come, do you deny seeing this young lady last night?

JACK Deny? No, of course [*Whispering*] Why did you give me away like this? What on earth did you come here for?

UNKNOWN [*tearfully*] I'm sure I didn't want to—it's not likely, is it? You snatched it out of my hand—you know you did—and the purse had all my money in it. I didn't follow you last night because I didn't want to make a fuss and it was so late, and you were so—

BARTHWICK Come, sir, don't turn your back on me—explain!

JACK [*desperately*] I don't remember anything about it [*In a low voice to his friend*] Why on earth couldn't you have written?

UNKNOWN [*sullenly*] I want it now, I must have it—I've got to pay my rent to-day [*She looks at BARTHWICK*] They're only too glad to jump on people who are not—not well off

JACK I don't remember anything about it, really. I don't remember anything about last night at all [*He puts his hand up to his head*] It's all—cloudy, and I've got such a beastly headache

UNKNOWN But you *took* it, you know you did. You said you'd score me off

JACK Well, then, it must be here. I remember now—I remember something. Why did I take the beastly thing?

BARTHWICK Yes, why did you take the beastly—

[*He turns abruptly to the window*]

UNKNOWN [*with her mesmeric smile*] You weren't quite — were you?

JACK [*smiling pallidly*] I'm awfully sorry. If there's anything I can do—

BARTHWICK Do? You can restore this property, I suppose

JACK I'll go and have a look, but I really don't think I've got it

[*He goes out hurriedly. And BARTHWICK, placing a chair, motions to the visitor to sit, then with pursed lips, he stands and eyes her fixedly. She sits,*

and steals a look at him, then turns away, and, drawing up her veil, stealthily wipes her eyes And JACK comes back]

JACK [*ruefully holding out the empty reticule*] Is that the thing? I've looked all over—I can't find the purse anywhere Are you sure it was there?

UNKNOWN [*tearfully*] Sure? Of course I'm sure A crimson silk purse It was all the money I had

JACK I really am awfully sorry—my head's so jolly bad I've asked the butler, but he hasn't seen it

UNKNOWN I must have my money

JACK Oh! Of course—that'll be all right, I'll see that that's all right How much?

UNKNOWN [*sullenly*] Seven pounds—twelve—it's all I've got in the world

JACK That'll be all right—I'll send you a cheque

UNKNOWN [*eagerly*] No, now, please Give me what was in my purse, I've got to pay my rent this morning They won't give me another day, I'm a fortnight behind already

JACK [*blankly*] I'm awfully sorry, I really haven't got a penny in my pocket

[*He glances stealthily at BARTHWICK*]

UNKNOWN [*excitedly*] Come, I say you must—it's my money, and you took it I'm not going away without it They'll turn me out of my place

JACK [*clapping his head*] But I can't give you what I haven't got Don't I tell you I haven't a beastly cent?

UNKNOWN [*tearing at her handkerchief*] Oh! do give it to me! [*She puts her hands together in appeal, then, with sudden fierceness*] If you don't I'll summons you It's stealing, that's what it is!

BARTHWICK [*uneasily*] One moment, please As a matter of—er—principle, I shall settle this claim [*He produces money*] Here is eight pounds, the extra will cover the value of the purse and your cab fares I need make no comment—no thanks are necessary

[*Touching the bell, he holds the door ajar in silence The unknown lady stores the money in her reticule, she looks from JACK to BARTHWICK, and her face is quivering faintly with a smile She hides it with her hand, and steals away Behind her BARTHWICK shuts the door*]

BARTHWICK [*with solemnity*] H'm! This is a nice thing to happen!

JACK [*impersonally*] What awful luck!

BARTHWICK So this is the way that forty pounds has gone! One thing after another! Once more I should like to know where you'd have been if it hadn't been for me! You don't seem to have any principles You—you're one of those who are a nuisance to society, you—you're dangerous! What your mother would say I don't know Your conduct, as far as I can see, is absolutely unjustifiable It's—it's criminal Why, a poor man who behaved as you've done—d'you think he'd have any mercy shown him? What you want is a good lesson You and your sort are—[*he speaks with feeling*]—a nuisance to the community Don't ask me to help you next time You're not fit to be helped

JACK [*turning upon his side, with unexpected fierceness*] All right, I won't then, and see how you like it You wouldn't have helped me this time, I know, if you hadn't been scared the thing would get into the papers Where are the cigarettes?

BARTHWICK [*regarding him uneasily*] Well—I'll say no more about it [*He rings the bell*] I'll pass it over for this once, but—[*MARLOW comes in*] You can clear away

[*He hides his face behind the "Times"*]

JACK [*brightening*] I say, Marlow, where are the cigarettes?

MARLOW I put the box out with the whisky last night, sir, but this morning I can't find it anywhere

JACK Did you look in my room?

MARLOW Yes, sir, I've looked all over the house I found two Nestor ends in the tray this morning, so you must have been smokin' last night, sir [*Hesitating*] I'm really afraid some one's purloined the box

JACK [*uneasily*] Stolen it!

BARTHWICK What's that? the cigarette-box? Is anything else missing?

MARLOW No, sir, I've been through the plate

BARTHWICK Was the house all right this morning? None of the windows open?

MARLOW No, sir [*Quietly to JACK*] You left your latch-key in the door last night, sir

[*He hands it back, unseen by BARTHWICK*]

JACK Tst!

BARTHWICK Who's been in the room this morning?

MARLOW Me and Wheeler, and Mrs Jones is all, sir, as far as I know

BARTHWICK Have you asked Mrs Barthwick? [*To JACK*] Go and ask your mother if she's had it, ask her to look and see if she's missed anything else [*JACK*

goes upon this mission] Nothing is more disquieting than losing things like this

MARLOW No, sir

BARTHWICK Have you any suspicions?

MARLOW No, sir

BARTHWICK This Mrs Jones—how long has she been working here?

MARLOW Only this last month, sir

BARTHWICK What sort of person?

MARLOW I don't know much about her, sir, seems a very quiet, respectable woman

BARTHWICK Who did the room this morning?

MARLOW Wheeler and Mrs Jones, sir

BARTHWICK [*with his forefinger up-raised*] Now, was this Mrs Jones in the room alone at any time?

MARLOW [*expressionless*] Yes, sir

BARTHWICK How do you know that?

MARLOW [*reluctantly*] I found her here, sir

BARTHWICK And has Wheeler been in the room alone?

MARLOW No, sir, she's not, sir I should say, sir, that Mrs Jones seems a very honest—

BARTHWICK [*holding up his hand*] I want to know this Has this Mrs Jones been here the whole morning?

MARLOW Yes, sir—no, sir—she stepped over to the greengrocer's for cook

BARTHWICK H'm! Is she in the house now?

MARLOW Yes, sir

BARTHWICK Very good I shall make a point of clearing this up On principle I shall make a point of fixing the responsibility, it goes to the foundations of security In all your interests—

MARLOW Yes, sir

BARTHWICK What sort of circumstances is this Mrs Jones in? Is her husband in work?

MARLOW I believe not, sir

BARTHWICK Very well Say nothing about it to any one Tell Wheeler not to speak of it, and ask Mrs Jones to step up here

MARLOW Very good, sir

[*MARLOW goes out, his face concerned, and BARTHWICK stays, his face judicious and a little pleased, as befits a man conducting an inquiry* MRS BARTHWICK and her son come in]

BARTHWICK Well, my dear, you've not seen it, I suppose?

MRS BARTHWICK No But what an extraordinary thing, John! Marlow, of

course, is out of the question I'm certain none of the maids—as for cook!

BARTHWICK Oh, cook!

MRS BARTHWICK Of course! It's perfectly detestable to me to suspect anybody

BARTHWICK It's not a question of one's feelings It's a question of justice On principle—

MRS BARTHWICK I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the charwoman knew something about it It was Laura who recommended her

BARTHWICK [*judicially*] I am going to have Mrs Jones up Leave it to me, and—remember that nobody is guilty until they're proven so I shall be careful I have no intention of frightening her, I shall give her every chance I hear she's in poor circumstances If we are not able to do much for them, we are bound to have the greatest sympathy with the poor [*MRS JONES comes in Pleasantly*] Oh! good morning, Mrs Jones

MRS JONES [*soft, and even, unemphatic*] Good morning, sir! Good morning, ma'am!

BARTHWICK About your husband—he's not in work, I hear?

MRS JONES No, sir, of course, he's not in work just now

BARTHWICK Then I suppose he's earning nothing

MRS JONES No, sir, he's not earning anything just now, sir

BARTHWICK And how many children have you?

MRS JONES Three children, but of course they don't eat very much, sir

[*A little silence*]

BARTHWICK 'And how old is the eldest?

MRS JONES Nine years old, sir

BARTHWICK Do they go to school?

MRS JONES Yes, sir, they all three go to school every day

BARTHWICK [*severely*] And what about their food when you're out at work?

MRS JONES Well, sir, I have to give them their dinner to take with them Of course I'm not always able to give them anything, sometimes I have to send them without, but my husband is very good about the children when he's in work But when he's not in work of course he's a very difficult man

BARTHWICK He drinks, I suppose?

MRS JONES Yes, sir Of course I can't say he doesn't drink, because he does

BARTHWICK And I suppose he takes all your money?

MRS JONES No, sir, he's very good about my money, except when he's not himself, and then, of course, he treats me very badly

BARTHWICK Now what is he—your husband?

MRS JONES By profession, sir, of course he's a groom

BARTHWICK A groom! How came he to lose his place?

MRS JONES He lost his place a long time ago, sir, and he's never had a very long job since, and now, of course, the motor cars are against him

BARTHWICK When were you married to him, Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES Eight years ago, sir—that was in —

MRS BARTHWICK [*sharply*] Eight? You said the eldest child was nine

MRS JONES Yes, ma'am, of course that was why he lost his place. He didn't treat me rightly, and of course his employer said he couldn't keep him because of the example

BARTHWICK You mean he—ahem —

MRS JONES Yes, sir, and of course after he lost his place he married me

MRS BARTHWICK You actually mean to say—you were —

BARTHWICK My dear —

MRS BARTHWICK [*indignantly*] How disgraceful!

BARTHWICK [*hurriedly*] And where are you living now, Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES We've not got a home, sir. Of course we've been obliged to put away most of our things

BARTHWICK Put your things away! You mean to—er—to pawn them?

MRS JONES Yes, sir, to put them away. We're living in Merthyr Street—that is close by here, sir—at No 34. We just have one room

BARTHWICK And what do you pay a week?

MRS JONES We pay six shillings a week, sir, for a furnished room

BARTHWICK And I suppose you are behind in the rent?

MRS JONES Yes, sir, we're a little behind in the rent

BARTHWICK But *you're* in good work, aren't you?

MRS JONES Well, sir, I have a day in Stamford Place Thursdays. And Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays I come here. But today, of course, is a half-day, because of yesterday's Bank Holiday

BARTHWICK I see, four days a week, and you get half a crown a day, is that it?

MRS JONES Yes, sir, and my dinner, but sometimes it's only half a day, and that's eighteenpence

BARTHWICK And when your husband earns anything he spends it in drink, I suppose?

MRS JONES Sometimes he does, sir, and sometimes he gives it to me for the children. Of course he would work if he could get it, sir, but it seems there are a great many people out of work

BARTHWICK Ah! Yes. We—er—won't go into that [*Sympathetically*]. And how about your work here? Do you find it hard?

MRS JONES Oh! no, sir, not very hard, sir, except of course, when I don't get my sleep at night

BARTHWICK Ah! And you help do all the rooms? And sometimes, I suppose, you go out for cook?

MRS JONES Yes, sir

BARTHWICK And you've been out this morning?

MRS JONES Yes, sir, of course I had to go to the greengrocer's

BARTHWICK Exactly. So your husband earns nothing? And he's a bad character

MRS JONES No, sir, I don't say that. Sir, I think there's a great deal of good in him, though he does treat me very bad sometimes. And of course I don't like to leave him, but I think I ought to, because really I hardly know how to stay with him. He often raises his hand to me. Not long ago he gave me a blow here [*touches her breast*] and I can feel it now. So I think I ought to leave him, don't you, sir?

BARTHWICK Ah! I can't help you there. It's a very serious thing to leave your husband. Very serious thing

MRS JONES Yes, sir, of course I'm afraid of what he might do to me if I were to leave him, he can be so very violent

BARTHWICK H'm! Well, that I can't pretend to say anything about. It's the bad principle I'm speaking of —

MRS JONES Yes, sir, I know nobody can help me. I know I must decide for myself, and of course I know that he has a very hard life. And he's fond of the children, and it's very hard for him to see them going without food

BARTHWICK [*hastily*] Well—er—thank you, I just wanted to hear about you. I don't think I need detain you any longer. Mrs—Jones

MRS JONES No, sir, thank you, sir

BARTHWICK Good morning, then

MRS JONES Good morning, sir, good morning, ma'am

BARTHWICK [*exchanging glances with his wife*] By the way, Mrs Jones, I think it is only fair to tell you, a silver cigarette-box—er—is missing

MRS JONES [*looking from one face to the other*] I am very sorry, sir

BARTHWICK Yes, you have not seen it, I suppose?

MRS JONES [*realizing that suspicion is upon her, with an uneasy movement*] Where was it, sir, if you please, sir?

BARTHWICK [*evasively*] Where did Marlow say? Er—in this room, yes, in *this* room

MRS JONES No, sir, I haven't seen it—of course if I'd seen it I would have noticed it

BARTHWICK [*giving her a rapid glance*] You—you are sure of that?

MRS JONES [*impassively*] Yes, sir [*With a slow nodding of her head*] I have not seen it, and of course I don't know where it is

[*She turns and goes quietly out*]

BARTHWICK H'm!

[*The three BARTHWICKS avoid each other's glances*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I—*The JONES'S lodgings, Merthyr*

Street, at half-past two o'clock

The bare room, with tattered oilcloth and damp, distempered walls, has an air of tidy wretchedness. On the bed lies JONES, half-dressed, his coat is thrown across his feet, and muddy boots are lying on the floor close by. He is asleep. The door is opened and MRS JONES comes in, dressed in a pinched black jacket and old black sailor hat, she carries a parcel wrapped up in the "Times". She puts her parcel down, unwraps an apron, half a loaf, two onions, three potatoes, and a tiny piece of bacon. Taking a teapot from the cupboard, she rinses it, shakes into it some powdered tea out of a screw of paper, puts it on the hearth, and sitting in a wooden chair quietly begins to cry

JONES [*stirring and yawning*] That you? What's the time?

MRS JONES [*drying her eyes, and in her usual voice*] Half-past two

JONES What you back so soon for?

MRS JONES I had only the half day today, Jem

JONES [*on his back, and in a drowsy voice*] Got anything for dinner?

MRS JONES Mrs Barthwick's cook gave me a little bit of bacon I am going to make a stew [*She prepares for cooking*] There's fourteen shillings owing for rent, James, and of course I've got only two and fourpence They'll be coming for it today

JONES [*turning towards her on his elbow*] Let 'em come and find my surprise packet I've had enough o' this trying for work Why should I go round and round after a job like a bloomin' squirrel in a cage "Give us a job, sir"—"Take a man on"—"Got a wife and three children" Sick of it I am! I'd sooner lie here and rot "Jones, you come and join the demonstration, come and 'old a flag and listen to the ruddy orators, and go 'ome as empty as you came" There's some that seems to like *that*—the sheep! When I go seekin' for a job now, and see the brutes lookin' me up and down, it's like a thousand serpents in me I'm not arskin' for any treat A man wants to sweat hussell silly and not allowed—that's a rum start, an't it? A man wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in him and an't allowed—that's justice—that's freedom and all the rest of it [*He turns his face towards the wall*] You're so milky mild, you don't know what goes on inside o' me I'm done with the silly game. If they want me, let 'em come for me! [*MRS JONES stops cooking and stands unmoving at the table*] I've tried and done with it, I tell you I've never been afraid of what's before me You mark my words—if you think they've broke my spirit, you're mistook I'll lie and rot sooner than arsk 'em again What makes you stand like that—you long-sufferin', Gawd-forsaken image—that's why I can't keep my hands off you So now you know Work! You can work, but you haven't the spirit of a louse!

MRS JONES [*quietly*] You talk more wild sometimes when you're yourself, James, than when you're not If you don't get work, how are we to go on? They won't let us stay here, they're looking to their money to-day, I know

JONES I see this Barthwick o' yours every day goin' down to Pawlyment snug and comfortable to talk his silly soul out, an' I see that young calf, his son, swellin' it about, and goin' on the razzle-dazzle Wot 'ave they done that makes 'em any better than wot I am? They never did a day's work in their lives I see 'em day after day—

MRS JONES And I wish you wouldn't come after me like that, and hang about the house. You don't seem able to keep away at all, and whatever you do it for I can't think, because of course they notice it.

JONES I suppose I may go where I like. Where may I go? The other day I went to a place in the Edgware Road "Gov'nor," I says to the boss, "take me on," I says "I 'aven't done a stroke o' work not these two months, it takes the heart out of a man," I says, "I'm one to work, I'm not afraid of anything you can give me!" "My good man," 'e says, "I've had thirty of you here this morning I took the first two," he says, "and that's all I want." "Thank you, then rot the world!" I says "Blasphem'n'," he says, "is not the way to get a job. Out you go, my lad!" [*He laughs sardonically*] Don't you raise your voice because you're starvin', don't yer even think of it, take it lyn' down! Take it like a sensible man, can't you? And a little way down the street a lady says to me [*Pinching his voice*] "D'you want to earn a few pence, my man?" and gives me her dog to 'old outside a shop—fat as a butler 'e was—tons o' meat had gone to the makin' of him. It did 'er good, it did, made 'er feel 'erself that *charitable*, but I see 'er lookin' at the copper standin' alongside o' me, for fear I should make off with 'er bloomin' fat dog [*He sits on the edge of the bed and puts a boot on. Then looking up*] What's in that head o' yours? [*Almost pathetically*] Can't you speak for once?

[*There is a knock, and MRS SEDDON, the landlady, appears, an anxious, harassed shabby woman in working clothes*]

MRS SEDDON I thought I 'eard you come in, Mrs Jones I've spoke to my 'usband, but he says he really can't afford to wait another day.

JONES [*with scowling jocularity*] Never you mind what your 'usband says, you go your own way like a proper independent woman. Here, Jenny, chuck her that.

[*Producing a sovereign from his trousers pocket, he throws it to his wife, who catches it in her apron with a gasp*]
JONES resumes the lacing of his boots.]

MRS JONES [*rubbing the sovereign stealthily*] I'm very sorry we're so late with it, and of course it's fourteen shillings, so if you've got six that will be right.

[*MRS SEDDON takes the sovereign and fumbles for the change*]

JONES [*with his eyes fixed on his boots*] Bit of a surprise for yer, ain't it?

MRS SEDDON Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged [*She does indeed appear surprised*] I'll bring you the change.

JONES [*mockingly*] Don't mention it.

MRS SEDDON Thank you, and I'm sure I'm very much obliged.

[*She slides away*]

[*MRS JONES gazes at JONES who is still lacing up his boots*]

JONES I've had a bit of luck [*Pulling out the crimson purse and some loose coins*] Picked up a purse—seven pound and more.

MRS JONES Oh, James!

JONES Oh, James! What about Oh, James! I picked it up I tell you. This is lost property, this is!

MRS JONES But isn't there a name in it, or something?

JONES Name? No, there ain't no name. This don't belong to such as 'ave visitin' cards. This belongs to a perfect 'lady. Take an' smell it [*He pinches her the purse, which she puts gently to her nose*] Now, you tell me what I ought to have done. You tell me that. You can always tell me what I ought to ha' done, can't yer?

MRS JONES [*laying down the purse*] I can't say what you ought to have done, James. Of course the money wasn't yours, you've taken somebody else's money.

JONES Finding's keeping. I'll take it as wages for the time I've gone about the streets asking for what's my rights. I'll take it for what's *overdue*, d'ye hear? [*With strange triumph*] I've got money in my pocket, my girl [*MRS JONES goes on again with the preparation of the meal, JONES looking at her furtively*] Money in my pocket! And I'm not goin' to waste it. With this 'ere money I'm goin' to Canada. I'll let you have a pound [*A silence*] You've often talked of leavin' me. You've often told me I treat you badly—well I 'ope you'll be glad when I'm gone.

MRS JONES [*impassively*] You have treated me very badly, James, and of course I can't prevent your going, but I can't tell whether I shall be glad when you're gone.

JONES It'll change my luck. I've 'ad nothing but bad luck since I first took up with you [*More softly*] And you've 'ad no bloomin' picnic.

MRS JONES Of course it would have been better for us if we had never met. We weren't meant for each other. But you're set against me, that's what you are, and

you *have* been for a long time And you treat me so badly, James, going after that Rosie and all You don't ever seem to think of the children that I've had to bring into the world, and of all the trouble I've had to keep them, and what'll become of them when you're gone

JONES [*crossing the room gloomily*] If you think I want to leave the little beggars you're bloomin' well mistaken

MRS JONES Of course I know you're fond of them

JONES [*fingering the purse, half angrily*] Well, then, you stow it, old girl The kids'll get along better with you than when I'm here If I'd ha' known as much as I do now, I'd never ha' had one o' them What's the use o' bringin' 'em into a state o' things like this? It's a crime, that's what it is, but you find it out too late, that's what's the matter with this 'ere world

[*He puts the purse back into his pocket*]

MRS JONES Of course it would have been better for them, poor little things, but they're your own children, and I wonder at you talkin' like that I should miss them dreadfully if I was to lose them

JONES [*sullenly*] An' you an't the only one If I make money out there— [*Looking up, he sees her shaking out his coat—in a changed voice*] Leave that coat alone!

[*The silver box drops from the pocket, scattering the cigarettes upon the bed Taking up the box she stares at it, he rushes at her and snatches the box away*]

MRS JONES [*cowering back against the bed*] Oh, Jem! oh, Jem!

JONES [*dropping the box onto the table*] You mind what you're sayin'! When I go out I'll take and chuck it in the water along with that there purse I 'ad it when I was in liquor, and for what you do when you're in liquor you're not responsible—and that's Gawd's truth as you ought to know I don't want the thing—I won't have it I took it out o' spite I'm no thief, I tell you, and don't you call me one, or it'll be the worse for you

MRS JONES [*trusting her apron strings*] It's Mr Barthwick's! You've taken away my reputation Oh, Jem, whatever made you?

JONES What d' you mean?

MRS JONES It's been missed, they think it's me Oh! whatever made you do it, Jem?

JONES I tell you I was in liquor I don't want it, what's the good of it to me? If I were to pawn it they'd only nab me

I'm no thief I'm no worse than wot that young Barthwick is, he brought 'ome that purse that I picked up—a lady's purse—'ad it off 'er in a row, kept sayin' 'e'd scored 'er off Well, I scored 'im off Tight as an owl 'e was! And d' you think anything'll happen to him?

MRS JONES [*as though speaking to herself*] Oh, Jem! it's the bread out of our mouths!

JONES Is it then? I'll make it hot for 'em yet What about that purse? What about young Barthwick? [*MRS JONES comes forward to the table and tries to take the box, JONES prevents her*] What do you want with that? You drop it, I say!

MRS JONES I'll take it back and tell them all about it

[*She attempts to wrest the box from him*]

JONES Ah, would yer?

[*He drops the box, and rushes on her with a snarl She slips back past the bed He follows, a chair is overturned The door is opened, SNOW comes in, a detective in plain clothes and a bowler hat, with clipped mustaches JONES drops his arms, MRS JONES stands by the window gasping, SNOW, advancing swiftly to the table, puts his hand on the silver box*]

SNOW Doin' a bit o' skylarkin'? Fancy this is what I'm after J B, the very same [*He gets back to the door, scrutinizing the crest and cypher on the box To MRS JONES*] I'm a police officer Are you Mrs Jones?

MRS JONES Yes, sir

SNOW My instructions are to take you on a charge of stealing this box from J Barthwick, Esquire, M P, of 6, Rockingham Gate Anything you say may be used against you Well, Missis?

MRS JONES [*in her quiet voice, still out of breath, her hand upon her breast*] Of course I did not take it, sir I never have taken anything that didn't belong to me, and of course I know nothing about it

SNOW You were at the house this morning, you did the room in which this box was left, you were alone in the room I find the box 'ere You say you didn't take it?

MRS JONES Yes, sir, of course I say I did not take it, because I did not

SNOW Then how does the box come to be here?

MRS JONES I would rather not say anything about it

SNOW Is this your husband?

MRS JONES Yes, sir, this is my husband, sir

SNOW Do you wish to say anything before I take her? [JONES remains silent, with his head bent down] Well then, Missis I'll just trouble you to come along with me quietly

MRS JONES [twisting her hands] Of course I wouldn't say I hadn't taken it if I had—and I *didn't* take it, indeed I didn't Of course I know appearances are against me, and I can't tell you what really happened But my children are at school, and they'll be coming home—and I don't know what they'll do without me!

SNOW Your 'usband'll see to them don't you worry

[He takes the woman gently by the arm]

JONES You drop it—she's all right! [Sullenly] I took the thing myself

SNOW [eyeing him] There, there, it does you credit Come along Missis

JONES [passionately] Drop it, I say, you blooming teck She's my wife, she's a respectable woman Take her if you dare!

SNOW Now, now What's the good of this? Keep a civil tongue, and it'll be the better for all of us

[He puts his whistle in his mouth and draws the woman to the door]

JONES [with a rush] Drop her, and put up your 'ands, or I'll soon make yer You leave her alone, will yer! Don't I tell yer, I took the thing myself!

SNOW [Blowing his whistle] Drop your hands, or I'll take you too Ah, would you?

[JONES, closing, deals him a blow A Policeman in uniform appears, there is a short struggle and JONES is overpowered MRS JONES raises her hands and drops her face on them]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II—The BARTHWICKS' dining room the same evening The BARTHWICKS are seated at dessert

MRS BARTHWICK John! [A silence broken by the cracking of nuts] John!

BARTHWICK I wish you'd speak about the nuts—they're uneatable

[He puts one into his mouth]

MRS BARTHWICK It's not the season for them I called on the Holyroods

[BARTHWICK fills his glass with port]

JACK Crackers, please, Dad

[BARTHWICK passes the crackers His demeanor is reflective]

MRS BARTHWICK Lady Holyrood

has got very stout I've noticed it coming for a long time

BARTHWICK [gloomily] Stout? [He takes up the crackers—with transparent airiness] The Holyroods had some trouble with their servants, didn't they?

JACK Crackers, please, Dad

BARTHWICK [passing the crackers] It got into the papers The cook, wasn't it?

MRS BARTHWICK No, the lady's maid I was talking it over with Lady Holyrood The girl used to have her young man to see her

BARTHWICK [uneasily] I am not sure they were wise—

MRS BARTHWICK My dear John, what are you talking about? How could there be any alternative? Think of the effect on the other servants!

BARTHWICK Of course in principle—I wasn't thinking of that

JACK [mahciously] Crackers, please, Dad

[BARTHWICK is compelled to pass the crackers]

MRS BARTHWICK Lady Holyrood told me "I had her up," she said, "I said to her, 'You'll leave my house at once, I think your conduct disgraceful I can't tell, I don't know, and I don't wish to know, what you were doing I send you away on principle, you need not come to me for a character' And the girl said 'If you don't give me my notice, my lady, I want a month's wages I'm perfectly respectable I've done nothing'"—Done nothing!

BARTHWICK H'm!

MRS BARTHWICK Servants have too much license They hang together so terribly you never can tell what they're really thinking, it's as if they were all in a conspiracy to keep you in the dark Even with Marlow, you feel that he never lets you know what's really in his mind I hate that secretiveness, it destroys all confidence I feel sometimes I should like to shake him

JACK Marlow's a most decent chap It's simply beastly every one knowing your affairs

BARTHWICK The less you say about that the better!

MRS BARTHWICK It goes all through the lower classes You can *not* tell when they are speaking the truth Today when I was shopping after leaving the Holyroods, one of these unemployed came up and spoke to me I suppose I only had twenty yards or so to walk to the carriage, but he seemed to spring up in the street

BARTHWICK Ah! You must be very careful whom you speak to in these days.

MRS BARTHWICK I didn't answer him, of course But I could see at once that he wasn't telling the truth

BARTHWICK [*cracking a nut*] There's one very good rule—look at their eyes

JACK Crackers, please, Dad

BARTHWICK [*passing the crackers*] If their eyes are straightforward I sometimes give them sixpence It's against my principles, but it's most difficult to refuse If you see that they're desperate, and dull, and shifty-looking, as so many of them are, it's certain to mean drink, or crime, or something unsatisfactory

MRS BARTHWICK This man had dreadful eyes He looked as if he could commit a murder "I've 'ad nothing to eat today," he said Just like that

BARTHWICK What was William about? He ought to have been waiting

JACK [*raising his wine-glass to his nose*] Is this the '63, Dad?

[BARTHWICK, *holding his wine-glass to his eye, lowers it and passes it before his nose*]

MRS BARTHWICK I hate people that can't speak the truth [*Father and son exchange a look behind their port*] It's just as easy to speak the truth as not I've always found it easy enough It makes it impossible to tell what is genuine, one feels as if one were continually being taken in

BARTHWICK [*sententiously*] The lower classes are their own enemies If they would only trust us, they would get on so much better

MRS BARTHWICK But even then it's so often their own fault Look at that Mrs Jones this morning

BARTHWICK I only want to do what's right in that matter I had occasion to see Roper this afternoon I mentioned it to him He's coming in this evening It all depends on what the detective says I've had my doubts I've been thinking it over

MRS BARTHWICK The woman impressed me most unfavorably She seemed to have no shame That affair she was talking about—she and the man when they were young, so immoral! And before you and Jack! I could have put her out of the room!

BARTHWICK Oh! I don't want to excuse them, but in looking at these matters one must consider—

MRS BARTHWICK Perhaps you'll say the man's employer was wrong in dismissing him?

BARTHWICK Of course not It's not there that I feel doubt What I ask myself is—

JACK Port, please, Dad

BARTHWICK [*circulating the decanter in religious imitation of the rising and setting of the sun*] I ask myself whether we are sufficiently careful in making inquiries about people before we engage them, especially as regards moral conduct

JACK Pass the port, please, Mother!

MRS BARTHWICK [*passing it*] My dear boy, aren't you drinking too much?

[JACK fills his glass]

MARLOW [*entering*] Detective Snow to see you, sir

BARTHWICK [*uneasily*] Ah! say I'll be with him in a minute

MRS BARTHWICK [*without turning*] Let him come in here, Marlow

[SNOW enters in an overcoat, his bowler hat in hand]

BARTHWICK [*half-rising*] Oh! Good evening!

SNOW Good evening, sir, good evening, ma'am I've called around to report what I've done, rather late, I'm afraid—another case took me away [*He takes the silver box out of his pocket, causing a sensation in the BARTHWICK family*] This is the identical article, I believe

BARTHWICK Certainly, certainly

SNOW Havin' your crest and cypher, as you described to me, sir, I'd no hesitation in the matter

BARTHWICK Excellent Will you have a glass of [*he glances at the waning port*]—er—sherry—[*pours out sherry*] Jack, just give Mr Snow this

[JACK rises and gives the glass to SNOW, then, *looming in his chair, regards him indolently*]

SNOW [*drinking off wine and putting down the glass*] After seeing you I went round to this woman's lodgings, sir It's a low neighborhood, and I thought it as well to place a constable below—and not without 'e was wanted, as things turned out

BARTHWICK Indeed!

SNOW Yes, sir, I 'ad some trouble I asked her to account for the presence of the article She could give me no answer, except to deny the theft, so I took her into custody, then her husband came for me, so I was obliged to take him, too, for assault He was very violent on the way to the station—very violent—threatened you and your son, and altogether he was a handful, I can tell you

MRS BARTHWICK What a ruffian he must be!

SNOW Yes, ma'am, a rough customer

JACK [*sipping his wine, bemused*] Punch the beggar's head

SNOW, Given to drink, as I understand, sir

MRS BARTHWICK It's to be hoped he will get a severe punishment

SNOW The odd thing is, sir, that he persists in sayin' he took the box himself

BARTHWICK Took the box himself! [*He smiles*] What does he think to gain by that?

SNOW He says the young gentleman was intoxicated last night— [*JACK stops the cracking of a nut and looks at SNOW BARTHWICK losing his smile, has put his wine-glass down, there is a silence—SNOW, looking from face to face, remarks*]—took him into the house and gave him whisky, and under the influence of an empty stomach the man says he took the box

MRS BARTHWICK The impudent wretch!

BARTHWICK D'you mean that he—er—intends to put that forward tomorrow—

SNOW That'll be his line, sir, but whether he's endeavouring to shield his wife, or whether [*he looks at JACK*] there's something in it, will be for the magistrate to say

MRS BARTHWICK [*haughtily*] Something in what? I don't understand you As if my son would bring a man like that into the house!

BARTHWICK [*from the fireplace, with an effort to be calm*] My son can speak for himself, no doubt—Well, Jack, what do you say?

MRS BARTHWICK [*sharply*] What does he say? Why, of course, he says the whole story's stuff!

JACK [*embarrassed*] Well, of course, I—of course, I don't know anything about it

MRS BARTHWICK I should think not, indeed! [*To SNOW*] The man is an audacious ruffian!

BARTHWICK [*suppressing jumps*] But in view of my son's saying there's nothing in this—this fable—will it be necessary to proceed against the man under the circumstances?

SNOW We shall have to charge him with the assault, sir It would be as well for your son to come down to the Court There'll be a remand, no doubt The queer thing is there was quite a sum of money found on him, and a crimson silk purse [*BARTHWICK starts, JACK rises and sits down again*] I suppose the lady hasn't missed her purse?

BARTHWICK [*hastily*] Oh, no! Oh! No!

JACK No

MRS BARTHWICK [*dreamily*] No! [*To SNOW*] I've been inquiring of the servants This man *does* hang about the house I shall feel much safer if he gets a good long sentence, I do think we ought to be protected against such ruffians

BARTHWICK Yes, yes, of course, on principle—but in this case we have a number of things to think of [*To SNOW*] I suppose, as you say, the man *must* be charged, eh?

SNOW No question about that, sir

BARTHWICK [*staring gloomily at JACK*] This prosecution goes very much against the grain with me I have great sympathy with the poor In my position I'm bound to recognize the distress there is amongst them The condition of the people leaves much to be desired D'you follow me? I wish I could see my way to drop it

MRS BARTHWICK [*sharply*] John! It's simply not fair to other people It's putting property at the mercy of any one who likes to take it

BARTHWICK [*trying to make signs to her aside*] I'm not defending him, not at all I'm trying to look at the matter broadly

MRS BARTHWICK Nonsense, John, there's a time for everything

SNOW [*rather sardonically*] I might point out, sir, that to withdraw the charge of stealing would not make much difference, because the facts must come out [*he looks significantly at JACK*] in reference to the assault, and as I said, that charge will have to go forward

BARTHWICK [*hastily*] Yes, ah! exactly! It's entirely on the woman's account—entirely a matter of my own private feelings

SNOW If I were you, sir, I should let things take their course It's not likely there'll be much difficulty These things are very quick settled

BARTHWICK [*doubtfully*] You think so—you think so?

JACK [*rousing himself*] I say, what shall I have to swear to?

SNOW That's best known to yourself, sir [*Retreating to the door*] Better employ a solicitor, sir, in case anything should arise We shall have the butler prove the loss of the article You'll excuse me going, I'm rather pressed to-night The case may come on any time after eleven Good evening, sir, good evening, ma'am I shall have to produce the box in court to-

morrow, so if you'll excuse me, sir, I may as well take it with me

[He takes the silver box and leaves them with a little bow]

[BARTHWICK makes a move to follow him, then dashing his hands beneath his coat-tails, speaks with desperation]

BARTHWICK I do wish you'd leave me to manage things myself You will put your nose into matters you know nothing of A pretty mess you've made of this!

MRS BARTHWICK *[coldly]* I don't in the least know what you're talking about If you can't stand up for your rights, I can I've no patience with your principles, it's such nonsense

BARTHWICK Principles! Good Heavens! What have principles to do with it, for goodness sake? Don't you know that Jack was drunk last night!

JACK Dad!

MRS BARTHWICK *[in horror, rising]* Jack!

JACK Look here, Mother—I had supper Everybody does I mean to say—you know what I mean—it's absurd to call it being drunk At Oxford everybody gets a bit "on" sometimes —

MRS BARTHWICK Well, I think it's most dreadful! If that is really what you do at Oxford —

JACK *[angrily]* Well, why did you send me there? One must do as other fellows do It's such nonsense, I mean, to call it being drunk Of course I'm awfully sorry I've had such a beastly headache all day

BARTHWICK Tcha! If you'd only had the common decency to remember what happened when you came in Then we should know what truth there was in what this fellow says—as it is, it's all the most confounded darkness

JACK *[staring as though at half-formed visions]* I just get a—and then—it's gone —

MRS BARTHWICK Oh, Jack! do you mean to say you were so tipsy you can't even remember —

JACK Look here, Mother! Of course I remember I came—I must have come —

BARTHWICK *[unguardedly, and walking up and down]* Tcha!—and that infernal purse! Good Heavens! It'll get into the papers Who on earth could have foreseen a thing like this? Better to have lost a dozen cigarette-boxes, and said nothing about it *[To his wife]* It's all your doing I told you so from the first I wish to goodness Roper would come!

MRS BARTHWICK *[sharply]* I don't know what you're talking about, John

BARTHWICK *[turning on her]* No, you—you—you don't know anything! *[Sharply]* Where the devil is Roper? If he can see a way out of this he's a better man than I take him for I defy any one to see a way out of it I can't

JACK Look here, don't excite, Dad—I can simply say I was too beastly tired, and don't remember anything except that I came in and *[in a dying voice]* went to bed the same as usual

BARTHWICK Went to bed? Who knows where you went—I've lost all confidence For all I know you slept on the floor

JACK *[indignantly]* I didn't I slept on the —

BARTHWICK *[sitting on the sofa]* Who cares where you slept, what does it matter if he mentions the—the—a perfect disgrace?

MRS BARTHWICK What? *[A silence]* I insist on knowing

JACK Oh! nothing —

MRS BARTHWICK Nothing? What do you mean by nothing, Jack? There's your father in such a state about it —

JACK It's only my purse

MRS BARTHWICK Your purse! You know perfectly well you haven't got one

JACK Well! it was somebody else's—it was all a joke—I didn't want the beastly thing —

MRS BARTHWICK Do you mean that you had another person's purse, and that this man took it too?

BARTHWICK Tcha! Of course he took it too! A man like that Jones will make the most of it It'll get into the papers

MRS BARTHWICK I don't understand What on earth is all the fuss about? *[Bending over JACK, and softly]* Jack, now tell me, dear! Don't be afraid What is it? Come!

JACK Oh, don't, Mother!

MRS BARTHWICK But don't what, dear?

JACK It was pure sport I don't know how I got the thing Of course I'd had a bit of a row—I didn't know what I was doing—I was—I was—well, you know—I suppose I must have pulled the bag out of her hand

MRS BARTHWICK Out of her hand? Whose hand? What bag—whose bag?

JACK Oh! I don't know—her bag—it belonged to—*[in a desperate and rising voice]* a woman

MRS BARTHWICK A woman Oh! Jack! No!

JACK *[jumping up]* You would have

it I didn't want to tell you It's not my fault

[*The door opens and MARLOW ushers in a man of middle age, inclined to corpulence, in evening dress He has a ruddy, thin moustache, and dark, quick-moving little eyes His eyebrows are Chinese*]

MARLOW Mr Roper, sir

[*He leaves the room*]

ROPER [*with a quick look around*]

How do you do?

[*But neither JACK nor MRS BARTHWICK make a sign*]

BARTHWICK [*hurrying*] Thank goodness you've come, Roper You remember what I told you this afternoon, we've just had the detective here

ROPER Got the box?

BARTHWICK Yes, yes, but look here—it wasn't the charwoman at all, her drunken loafer of a husband took the things—he says that fellow there [*he waves his hand at JACK, who with his shoulder raised, seems trying to ward off a blow*] let him into the house last night Can you imagine such a thing?

[*ROPER laughs*]

BARTHWICK [*with excited emphasis*] It's no laughing matter, Roper I told you about that business of Jack's too—don't you see—the brute took both the things—took that infernal purse It'll get into the papers

ROPER [*raising his eyebrows*] H'm! The purse! Depravity in high life! What does your son say?

BARTHWICK He remembers nothing D—n! Did you ever see such a mess? It'll get into the papers

MRS BARTHWICK [*with her hand across her eyes*] Oh! it's not that—

[*BARTHWICK and ROPER turn and look at her*]

BARTHWICK It's the idea of that woman—she's just heard— [ROPER nods And MRS BARTHWICK, setting her lips, gives a slow look at JACK, and sits down at the table] What on earth's to be done, Roper? A ruffian like this Jones will make all the capital he can out of that purse

MRS BARTHWICK I don't believe that Jack took that purse

BARTHWICK What—when the woman came here for it this morning?

MRS BARTHWICK Here? She had the impudence? Why wasn't I told?

[*She looks round from face to face—no one answers her, there is a pause*]

BARTHWICK [*suddenly*] What's to be done, Roper?

ROPER [*quietly to JACK*] I suppose you didn't leave your latch-key in the door?

JACK [*sullenly*] Yes, I did

BARTHWICK Good heavens! What next?

MRS BARTHWICK I'm certain you never let that man into the house, Jack, it's a wild invention I'm sure there's not a word of truth in it, Mr Roper

ROPER [*very suddenly*] Where did you sleep last night?

JACK [*promptly*] On the sofa, there— [*hesitating*] that is—I—

BARTHWICK On the sofa? D'you mean to say you didn't go to bed?

JACK [*sullenly*] No

BARTHWICK If you don't remember anything, how can you remember that?

JACK Because I woke up there in the morning

MRS BARTHWICK Oh, Jack!

BARTHWICK Good Gracious!

JACK And Mrs Jones saw me I wish you wouldn't bait me so

ROPER Do you remember giving any one a drink?

JACK By Jove, I do seem to remember a fellow with—a fellow with— [He looks at ROPER] I say, d'you want me—?

ROPER [*quick as lightning*] With a dirty face?

JACK [*with illumination*] I do—I distinctly remember his—

[*BARTHWICK moves abruptly, MRS BARTHWICK looks at ROPER angrily and touches her son's arm*]

MRS BARTHWICK You don't remember, it's ridiculous! I don't believe the man was ever here at all

BARTHWICK You must speak the truth, if it is the truth But if you do remember such a dirty business, I shall wash my hands of you altogether

JACK [*glaring at them*] Well, what the devil—

MRS BARTHWICK Jack!

JACK Well, Mother, I—I—don't know what you do want

MRS BARTHWICK We want you to speak the truth and say you never let this low man into the house

BARTHWICK Of course if you think that you really gave this man whisky in that disgraceful way, and let him see what you'd been doing, and were in such a disgusting condition that you don't remember a word of it—

ROPER [*quick*] I've no memory myself—never had

BARTHWICK [*desperately*] I don't know what you're to say

ROPER [*to JACK*] Say nothing at all! Don't put yourself in a false position. The man stole the things or the woman stole the things, you had nothing to do with it. You were asleep on the sofa.

MRS BARTHWICK Your leaving the latch-key in the door was quite bad enough, there's no need to mention anything else [*Touching his forehead softly*]. My dear, how hot your head is!

JACK But I want to know what I'm to do [*Passionately*]. I won't be badgered like this.

[*MRS BARTHWICK recoils from him*]

ROPER [*very quickly*] You forget all about it. You were asleep.

JACK Must I go down to the Court tomorrow?

ROPER [*shaking his head*] No.

BARTHWICK [*in a relieved voice*] Is that so?

ROPER Yes.

BARTHWICK But you'll go, Roper.

ROPER Yes.

JACK [*with wan cheerfulness*] Thanks, awfully! So long as I don't have to go [*Putting his hand up to his head*]. I think if you'll excuse me—I've had a most beastly day.

[*He looks from his father to his mother*].

MRS BARTHWICK [*turning quickly*]. Good-night, my boy.

JACK Good night, Mother.

[*He goes out. MRS BARTHWICK heaves a sigh. There is a silence*].

BARTHWICK He gets off too easily. But for my money that woman would have prosecuted him.

ROPER You find money useful.

BARTHWICK I've my doubts whether we ought to hide the truth—

ROPER There'll be a remand.

BARTHWICK What! D'you mean he'll have to appear on the remand?

ROPER Yes.

BARTHWICK H'm, I thought you'd be able to—Look here, Roper, you must keep that purse out of the papers.

[*ROPER fixes his little eyes on him and nods*].

MRS BARTHWICK Mr Roper, don't you think the magistrate ought to be told what sort of people these Joneses are, I mean about their immorality before they were married. I don't know if John told you.

ROPER Afraid it's not material.

MRS BARTHWICK Not material?

ROPER Purely private life! May have happened to the magistrate.

BARTHWICK [*with a movement as if to shift a burden*]. Then you'll take the thing into your hands?

ROPER If the gods are kind.

[*He holds his hand out*].

BARTHWICK [*shaking it dubiously*]. Kind—eh? What? You going?

ROPER Yes, I've another case, something like yours—most unexpected.

[*He bows to MRS BARTHWICK, and goes out, followed by BARTHWICK, talking to the last. MRS BARTHWICK at the table bursts into smothered sobs. BARTHWICK returns*].

BARTHWICK [*to himself*]. There'll be a scandal!

MRS BARTHWICK [*disguising her grief at once*]. I simply can't imagine what Roper means by making a joke of a thing like that!

BARTHWICK [*staring strangely*]. You! You can't imagine anything! You've no more imagination than a fly!

MRS BARTHWICK [*angrily*]. You dare to tell me that I have no imagination.

BARTHWICK [*flustered*]. I—I'm upset. From beginning to end the whole thing has been utterly against my principles.

MRS BARTHWICK Rubbish! You haven't any! Your principles are nothing in the world but sheer—fright!

BARTHWICK [*walking to the window*]. I've never been frightened in my life. You heard what Roper said. It's enough to upset one when a thing like this happens. Everything one says and does seems to turn in one's mouth—it's—it's uncanny. It's not the sort of thing I've been accustomed to [*As though stifling, he throws the windows open. The faint sobbing of a child comes in*]. What's that? [*They listen*].

MRS BARTHWICK [*sharply*]. I can't stand that crying. I must send Marlow to stop it. My nerves are all on edge.

[*She rings the bell*].

BARTHWICK I'll shut the window, you'll hear nothing.

[*He shuts the window. There is silence*].

MRS BARTHWICK [*sharply*]. That's no good! It's on my nerves. Nothing upsets me like a child's crying [*MARLOW comes in*]. What's that noise of crying, Marlow? It sounds like a child.

BARTHWICK It is a child. I can see it against the railings.

MARLOW [*opening the window, and looking out—quietly*]. It's Mrs Jones's

little boy, ma'am, he came here after his mother

MRS BARTHWICK [*moving quickly to the window*] Poor little chap! John, we oughtn't to go on with this!

BARTHWICK [*sitting heavily in a chair*] Ah! but it's out of our hands!

[MRS BARTHWICK turns her back to the window. There is an expression of distress on her face. She stands motionless, compressing her lips. The crying begins again. BARTHWICK covers his ears with his hands, and MARLOW shuts the window. The crying ceases.]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

Eight days have passed, and the scene is a London Police Court at one o'clock. A canopied seat of Justice is surmounted by the lion and unicorn. Before the fire a worn-looking MAGISTRATE is warming his coat-tails, and staring at two little girls in faded blue and orange rags, who are placed before the dock. Close to the witness-box is a RELIEVING OFFICER in an overcoat, and a short brown beard. Beside the little girls stands a bald POLICE CONSTABLE. On the front bench are sitting BARTHWICK and ROPER, and behind them JACK. In the railed enclosure are seedy-looking men and women. Some prosperous constables sit or stand about

MAGISTRATE [*in his paternal and ferocious voice, kissing his s's*] Now let us dispose of these young ladies.

USHER Theresa Livens, Maud Livens [*The bald CONSTABLE indicates the little girls, who remain silent, disillusioned, matter-of-fact*] Relieving Officer! [*The RELIEVING OFFICER steps into the witness-box*]

USHER The evidence you give to the Court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God! Kiss the book! [*The book is kissed*]

RELIEVING OFFICER [*in a monotone, pausing slightly at each sentence end, that his evidence may be inscribed*] About ten o'clock this morning, your Worship, I found these two little girls in Blue Street, Pulham, crying outside a public-house. Asked where their home was, they said they had no home. Mother had gone away. Asked about their father, Their father had

no work. Asked where they slept last night. At their aunt's. I've made inquiries, your Worship. The wife has broken up the home and gone on the streets. The husband is out of work and living in common lodging-houses. The husband's sister has eight children of her own, and says she can't afford to keep these little girls any longer.

MAGISTRATE [*returning to his seat beneath the canopy of Justice*] Now, let me see. You say the mother is on the streets, what evidence have you of that?

RELIEVING OFFICER I have the husband here, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE Very well, then let us see him [*There are cries of "LIVENS"*]. The MAGISTRATE leans forward, and stares with hard compassion at the little girls. LIVENS comes in. He is quiet, with grizzled hair, and a muffler for a collar. He stands beside the witness-box. And you are their father? Now, why don't you keep your little girls at home. How is it you leave them to wander about the streets like this?

LIVENS I've got no home, your Worship. I'm living from 'and to mouth. I've got no work, and nothin' to keep them on.

MAGISTRATE How is that?

LIVENS [*ashamedly*] My wife she broke my 'ome up, and pawned the things.

MAGISTRATE But what made you let her?

LIVENS Your Worship, I'd no chance to stop 'er, she did it when I was out lookin' for work.

MAGISTRATE Did you ill-treat her?

LIVENS [*emphatically*] I never raised my 'and to her in my life, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE Then what was it—did she drink?

LIVENS Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE Was she loose in her behaviour?

LIVENS [*in a low voice*] Yes, your Worship.

MAGISTRATE And where is she now?

LIVENS I don't know, your Worship. She went off with a man, and after that I—

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes. Who knows anything of her? [*To the bald CONSTABLE*] Is she known here?

RELIEVING OFFICER Not in this district, your Worship, but I have ascertained that she is well known—

MAGISTRATE Yes—yes, we'll stop at that. Now [*to the Father*] you say that she has broken up your home, and left these little girls. What provision can you make for them? You look a strong man.

LIVENS So I am, your Worship I m willin' enough to work, but for the life of me I can't get anything to do

MAGISTRATE But have you tried?

LIVENS I've tried everything, your Worship—I've tried my 'ardest

MAGISTRATE Well, well—

[*There is a silence*]

RELIEVING OFFICER If your Worship thinks it's a case, my people are willing to take them

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes, I know, but I've no evidence that this man is not the proper guardian for his children

[*He rises and goes back to the fire*]

RELIEVING OFFICER The mother, your Worship, is able to get access to them

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes, the mother, of course, is an improper person to have anything to do with them [*To the Father*] Well now what do you say?

LIVENS Your Worship, I can only say that if I could get work I should be only too willing to provide for them But what can I do, your Worship? Here I am obliged to live from 'and to mouth in these 'ere common lodging-houses I'm a strong man—I'm willing to work—I'm half as alive again as some of 'em—but you see, your Worship, my 'air's turned a bit, owing to the fever—[*touches his hair*—and that's against me, and I don't seem to get a chance anyhow

MAGISTRATE Yes—yes [*Slowly*] Well, I think it's a case [*Staring his hardest at the little girls*] Now, are you willing that these little girls should be sent to a home?

LIVENS Yes, your Worship, I should be very willing

MAGISTRATE Well, I'll remand them for a week Bring them again to-day week, if I see no reason against it then, I'll make an order

RELIEVING OFFICER To-day week, your Worship

[*The bald CONSTABLE takes the little girls out by the shoulders The father follows them The MAGISTRATE, returning to his seat, bends over and talks to his CLERK inaudibly*]

BARTHWICK [*speaking behind his hand*] A painful case, Roper, very distressing state of things

ROPER Hundreds like this in the Police Courts

BARTHWICK Most distressing! The more I see of it, the more important this question of the condition of the people seems to become I shall certainly make a

point of taking up the cudgels in the House I shall move—

[*The MACISTRATE ceases talking to his CLERK*]

CLERK Remands!

[*BARTHWICK stops abruptly There is a stir and MRS JONES comes in by the public door, JONES, ushered by policemen, comes from the prisoner's door They file into the dock*]

CLERK James Jones, Jane Jones

USHER Jane Jones!

BARTHWICK [*in a whisper*] The purse—the purse must be kept out of it, Roper Whatever happens, you must keep that out of the papers [*ROPER nods*]

BALD CONSTABLE Hush!

[*MRS JONES, dressed in her thin, black, wispy dress and black straw hat, stands motionless with hands crossed on the front rail of the dock JONES leans against the back rail of the dock, and keeps half turning, glancing defiantly about him He is haggard and unshaven*]

CLERK [*consulting with his papers*] This is the case remanded from last Wednesday, sir Theft of a silver cigarette-box and assault on the police, the two charges were taken together Jane Jones! James Jones!

MAGISTRATE [*staring*] Yes, yes, I remember

CLERK Jane Jones

MRS JONES Yes, sir

CLERK Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John Barthwick, M P, between the hours of 11 P.M. on Easter Monday and 8.45 A.M. on Easter Tuesday last? Yes, or no?

MRS JONES [*in a low voice*] No, sir, I do not, sir

CLERK James Jones? Do you admit stealing a silver cigarette-box valued at five pounds, ten shillings, from the house of John Barthwick, M P, between the hours of 11 P.M. on Easter Monday and 8.45 A.M. on Easter Tuesday last? And further making an assault on the police when in the execution of their duty at 3 P.M. on Easter Tuesday? Yes, or no?

JONES [*sullenly*] Yes, but I've got a lot to say about it

MAGISTRATE [*to the CLERK*] Yes—Yes But how comes it that these two people are charged with the same offense? Are they husband and wife?

CLERK Yes, sir You remember you ordered a remand for further evidence as to the story of the male prisoner

MAGISTRATE Have they been in custody since?

CLERK You released the woman on her own recognisances, sir

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes, this is the case of the silver box, I remember now Well?

CLERK Thomas Marlow

[*The cry of "THOMAS MARLOW" is repeated MARLOW comes in, and steps into the witness-box*]

USHER The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God Kiss the book

[*The book is kissed The silver box is handed up, and placed on the rail*]

CLERK [*reading from his papers*]

Your name is Thomas Marlow? Are you butler to John Barthwick, M P, of 6, Rockingham Gate?

MARLOW Yes, sir

CLERK Is that the box?

MARLOW Yes, sir

CLERK And did you miss the same at 8.45 on the following morning, on going to remove the tray?

MARLOW Yes, sir

CLERK Is the female prisoner known to you? [*MARLOW nods*] Is she the charwoman employed at 6, Rockingham Gate? [*Again MARLOW nods*] Did you at the time of your missing the box find her in the room alone?

MARLOW Yes, sir

CLERK Did you afterwards communicate the loss to your employer, and did he send you to the police station?

MARLOW Yes, sir

CLERK [*to MRS JONES*] Have you anything to ask him?

MRS JONES No, sir, nothing, thank you, sir

CLERK [*to JONES*] James Jones, have you anything to ask this witness?

JONES I don't know 'im

MAGISTRATE Are you sure you put the box in the place you say at the time you say?

MARLOW Yes, your Worship

MAGISTRATE Very well, then now let us have the officer

[*MARLOW leaves the box, and SNOW goes into it*]

USHER The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God [*The book is kissed*]

CLERK [*reading from his papers*]

Your name is Robert Snow? You are a detective in the X B division of the Metropolitan police force? According to instruc-

tions received did you on Easter Tuesday last proceed to the prisoner's lodgings at 34, Merthyr St eet, St Soames's? And did you on entering see the box produced, lying on the table?

SNOW Yes, sir

CLERK Is that the box?

SNOW [*fingering the box*] Yes, sir

CLERK And did you thereupon take possession of it, and charge the female prisoner with theft of the box from 6, Rockingham Gate? And did she deny the same?

SNOW Yes, sir

CLERK Did you take her into custody?

SNOW Yes, sir

MAGISTRATE What was her behaviour?

SNOW Perfectly quiet, your Worship She persisted in the denial That's all

MAGISTRATE Do you know her?

SNOW No, your Worship

MAGISTRATE Is she known here?

BALD CONSTABLE No, your Worship, they're neither of them known, we've nothing against them at all

CLERK [*to MRS JONES*] Have you anything to ask the officer?

MRS JONES No, sir, thank you, I've nothing to ask him

MAGISTRATE Very well then—go on

CLERK [*reading from his papers*] And while you were taking the female prisoner did the male prisoner interpose, and endeavour to hinder you in the execution of your duty, and did he strike you a blow?

SNOW Yes, sir

CLERK And did he say, "You let her go, I took the box myself"?

SNOW He did

CLERK And did you blow your whistle and obtain the assistance of another constable, and take him into custody?

SNOW I did

CLERK Was he violent on the way to the station, and did he use bad language, and did he several times repeat that he had taken the box himself? [*SNOW nods*] Did you thereupon ask him in what manner he had stolen the box? And did you understand him to say he had entered the house at the invitation of young Mr Barthwick [*BARTHWICK, turning in his seat, frowns at ROPER*] after midnight on Easter Monday, and partaken of whisky, and that under the influence of the whisky he had taken the box?

SNOW I did, sir

CLERK And was his demeanor throughout very violent?

SNOW It was very violent

JONES [*breaking in*] Violent—of

course it was! You put your 'ands on my wife when I kept tellin' you I took the thing myself

MAGISTRATE [*hissing, with protruded neck*] Now—you will have your chance of saying what you want to say presently Have you anything to ask the officer?

JONES [*sullenly*] No

MAGISTRATE Very well then Now let us hear what the female prisoner has to say first

MRS JONES Well, your Worship, of course I can only say what I've said all along, that I didn't take the box

MAGISTRATE Yes, but did you know that it was taken?

MRS JONES No, your Worship And, of course, to what my husband says, your Worship, I can't speak of my own knowledge Of course, I know that he came home very late on the Monday night It was past one o'clock when he came in, and he was not himself at all

MAGISTRATE Had he been drinking?

MRS JONES Yes, your Worship

MAGISTRATE And was he drunk?

MRS JONES Yes, your Worship, he was almost quite drunk

MAGISTRATE And did he say anything to you?

MRS JONES No, your Worship, only to call me names And of course in the morning when I got up and went to work he was asleep And I don't know anything more about it until I came home again Except that Mr Barthwick—that's my employer—your Worship—told me the box was missing

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes

MRS JONES But of course when I was shaking out my husband's coat the cigarette-box fell out and all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed

MAGISTRATE You say all the cigarettes were scattered on the bed? [*To SNOW*] Did you see the cigarettes scattered on the bed?

SNOW No, your Worship, I did not

MAGISTRATE You see he says he didn't see them

JONES Well, they were there for all that

SNOW I can't say, your Worship, that I had the opportunity of going round the room, I had all my work cut out with the male prisoner

MAGISTRATE [*to MRS JONES*] Well, what more have you to say?

MRS JONES Of course when I saw the box, your Worship, I was dreadfully upset, and I couldn't think why he had done such

a thing, when the officer came, we were having words about it, because it is ruin to me, your Worship, in my profession, and I have three little children dependent on me

MAGISTRATE [*protruding his neck*] Yes—yes—but what did he say to you?

MRS JONES I asked him whatever came over him to do such a thing—and he said it was the drink He said he had had too much to drink, and something came over him And of course, your Worship, he had had very little to eat all day, and the drink does go to the head when you have not had enough to eat Your Worship may not know, but it is the truth And I would like to say that all through his married life, I have never known him to do such a thing before, though we have passed through great hardships and [*speaking with soft emphasis*] I am quite sure he would not have done it if he had been himself at the time

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes But don't you know that that is no excuse?

MRS JONES Yes, your Worship I know that it is no excuse

[*The MAGISTRATE leans over and parleys with his CLERK*]

JACK [*leaning over from his seat behind*] I say, Dad—

BARTHWICK Tsst! [*Sheltering his mouth he speaks to ROPER*] Roper, you had better get up now and say that considering the circumstances and the poverty of the prisoners, we have no wish to proceed any further, and if the magistrate would deal with the case as one of disorder only on the part of—

BALD CONSTABLE Hssshh!

[*ROPER shakes his head*]

MAGISTRATE Now, supposing what you say and what your husband says is true, what I have to consider is—how did he obtain access to this house, and were you in any way a party to his obtaining access? You are the charwoman employed at the house?

MRS JONES Yes, your Worship, and of course if I had let him into the house it would have been very wrong of me, and I have never done such a thing in any of the houses where I have been employed

MAGISTRATE Well—so you say Now let us hear what story the male prisoner makes of it

JONES [*who leans with his arms on the dock behind, speaks in a slow, sullen voice*] Wot I say is wot my wife says I've never been 'ad up in a police court before, an' I can prove I took it when in liquor I told

her, and she can tell you the same, that I was goin' to throw the thing into the water sooner than 'ave it on my mind

MAGISTRATE But how did you get into the house?

JONES I was passin' I was goin' 'ome from the "Goat and Bells"

MAGISTRATE The "Goat and Bells,"—what is that? A public-house?

JONES Yes, at the corner It was Bank 'oliday, an' I'd a drop to drink I see this young Mr Barthwick tryin' to find the keyhole on the wrong side of the door

MAGISTRATE Well?

JONES [*slowly and with many pauses*] Well—I 'elped 'im to find it—drunk as a lord 'e was He goes on, an' comes back again, and says, I've got nothin' for you, 'e says, but come in an' 'ave a drink So I went in just as you might 'ave done yourself We 'ad a drink o' whisky just as you might have 'ad, 'nd young Mr Barthwick says to me, "Take a drink 'nd a smoke Take anything you like, 'e says" And then he went to sleep on the sofa I 'ad some more whisky—an' I 'ad a smoke—and I 'ad some more whisky—an' I can't tell yer what 'appened after that

MAGISTRATE Do you mean to say that you were so drunk that you can remember nothing?

JACK [*softly to his father*] I say, that's exactly what—

BARTHWICK Tssh!

JONES That's what I do mean

MAGISTRATE And yet you say you stole the box?

JONES I never stole the box I took it
MAGISTRATE [*hissing with protruded neck*] You did not steal it—you took it Did it belong to you—what is that but stealing?

JONES I took it

MAGISTRATE You took it—you took it away from their house and you took it to your house—

JONES [*sullenly breaking in*] I ain't got a house

MAGISTRATE Very well, let us hear what this young man Mr—Mr Barthwick—has to say to your story

[SNOW leaves the witness-box The BALD CONSTABLE beckons JACK, who clutching his hat, goes into the witness-box ROPER moves to the table set apart for his profession]

SWEARING CLERK The evidence you give to the court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God Kiss the book

[*The book is kissed*]

ROPER [*examining*] What is your name?

JACK [*in a low voice*] John Barthwick, Junior [*The CLERK writes it down*]

ROPER Where do you live?

JACK At 6, Rockingham Gate

[*All his answers are recorded by the CLERK*]

ROPER You are the son of the owner?

JACK [*in a very low voice*] Yes

ROPER Speak up, please Do you know the prisoners?

JACK [*looking at the JONESES, in a low voice*] I've seen Mrs Jones I [*in a loud voice*] don't know the man

JONES Well, I know you!

BALD CONSTABLE Hssh!

ROPER Now, did you come in late on the night of Easter Monday?

JACK Yes

ROPER And did you by mistake leave your latch-key in the door?

JACK Yes

MAGISTRATE Oh! You left your latch-key in the door?

ROPER And is that all you can remember about your coming in?

JACK [*in a loud voice*] Yes, it is

MAGISTRATE Now, you have heard the male prisoner's story, what do you say to that?

JACK [*turning to the MAGISTRATE, speaks suddenly in a confident, straightforward voice*] The fact of the matter is, sir, that I'd been out to the theatre that night, and had supper afterwards, and I came in late

MAGISTRATE Do you remember this man being outside when you came in?

JACK No, sir [*He hesitates*] I don't think I do

MAGISTRATE [*somewhat puzzled*] Well, did he help you to open the door, as he says? Did any one help you to open the door?

JACK No, sir—I don't think so, sir—I don't know

MAGISTRATE You don't know? But you must know It isn't a usual thing for you to have the door opened for you, is it?

JACK [*with a shamefaced smile*] No

MAGISTRATE Very well, then—

JACK [*desperately*] The fact of the matter is, sir, I'm afraid I'd had too much champagne that night

MAGISTRATE [*smiling*] Oh! you'd had too much champagne?

JONES May I ask the gentleman a question?

MAGISTRATE Yes—yes—you may ask him what questions you like

JONES Don't you remember you said you was a Liberal, same as your father, and you asked me wot I was?

JACK [*with his hand against his brow*] I seem to remember—

JONES And I said to you, "I'm a bloomin' Conservative," I said, an' you said to me, "You look more like one of these 'ere Socialists. Take wotever you like," you said

JACK [*with sudden resolution*] No, I don't I don't remember anything of the sort

JONES Well, I do, an' my word's as good as yours I've never been had up in a police court before. Look 'ere, don't you remember you had a sky-blue bag in your 'and— [BARTHWICK jumps]

ROPER I submit to your Worship that these questions are hardly to the point, the prisoner having admitted that he himself does not remember anything [*There is a smile on the face of Justice*] It is a case of the blind leading the blind

JONES [*violently*] I've done no more than wot he 'as I'm a poor man, I've got no money an' no friends—he's a toff—he can do wot I can't

MAGISTRATE Now, now! All this won't help you—you must be quiet. You say you took this box? Now, what made you take it? Were you pressed for money?

JONES I'm always pressed for money

MAGISTRATE Was that the reason you took it?

JONES No

MAGISTRATE [*to SNOW*] Was anything found on him?

SNOW Yes, your Worship. There was six pounds twelve shillin's found on him, and this purse

[*The red silk purse is handed to the MAGISTRATE. BARTHWICK rises in his seat, but hastily sits down again*]

MAGISTRATE [*staring at the purse*] Yes, yes—let me see— [*There is a silence*] No, no, I've nothing before me as to the purse. How did you come by all that money?

JONES [*after a long pause, suddenly*] I declines to say

MAGISTRATE But if you had all that money, what made you take this box?

JONES I took it out of spite

MAGISTRATE [*hissing, with protruded neck*] You took it out of spite? Well, now, that's something! But do you imagine you can go about the town taking things out of spite?

JONES If you had my life, if you'd been out of work—

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes, I know—because you're out of work you think it's an excuse for everything

JONES [*pointing at JACK*] You ask 'im wot made 'im take the—

ROPER [*quietly*] Does your Worship require this witness in the box any longer?

MAGISTRATE [*ironically*] I think not, he is hardly profitable

[*JACK leaves the witness-box, and hanging his head, resumes his seat*]

JONES You ask 'im wot made 'im take the lady's—

[*But the BALD CONSTABLE catches him by the sleeve*]

BALD CONSTABLE Sssh!

MAGISTRATE [*emphatically*] Now listen to me I've nothing to do with what he may or may not have taken. Why did you resist the police in the execution of their duty?

JONES It warn't their duty to take my wife, a respectable woman, that 'adn't done nothing

MAGISTRATE But I say it was. What made you strike the officer a blow?

JONES Any man would a struck 'im a blow. I'd strike 'im again, I would

MAGISTRATE You are not making your case any better by violence. How do you suppose we could get on if everybody behaved like you?

JONES [*leaning forward, earnestly*] Well, wot about 'er, who's to make up to 'er for this? Who's to give 'er back 'er good name?

MRS JONES Your Worship, it's the children that's preying on his mind, because of course I've lost my work. And I've had to find another room owing to the scandal

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes, I know—but if he hadn't acted like this nobody would have suffered

JONES [*glaring round at JACK*] I've done no worse than wot 'e 'as. Wot I want to know is wot's goin' to be done to 'im

[*The BALD CONSTABLE again says "Hssh!"*]

ROPER Mr Barthwick wishes it known, your Worship, that considering the poverty of the prisoners he does not press the charge as to the box. Perhaps your Worship would deal with the case as one of disorder

JONES I don't want it smothered up, I want it all dealt with fair—I want my rights—

MAGISTRATE [*rapping his desk*] Now you have said all you have to say, and

you will be quiet [*There is a silence, the MAGISTRATE bends over and parleys with his CLERK*] Yes, I think I may discharge the woman [*In a kindly voice he addresses MRS JONES, who stands unmoving with her hands crossed on the rail*] It is very unfortunate for you that this man has behaved as he has. It is not the consequences to him but the consequences to you. You have been brought here twice, you have lost your work— [*He glares at JONES*]—and this is what always happens. Now you may go away, and I am very sorry it was necessary to bring you here at all.

MRS JONES [*softly*] Thank you very much, your Worship.

[*She leaves the dock, and looking back at JONES, twists her fingers and is still*]

MAGISTRATE Yes, yes, but I can't pass it over. Go away, there's a good woman. [*MRS JONES stands back. The MAGISTRATE leans his head on his hand, then raising it he speaks to JONES*] Now, listen to me. Do you wish the case to be settled here, or do you wish it to go before a jury?

JONES [*muttering*] I don't want no jury.

MAGISTRATE Very well then, I will deal with it here. [*After a pause*] You have pleaded guilty to stealing this box—

JONES Not to steal!—

BALD CONSTABLE Hssshh!

MAGISTRATE And to assaulting the police—

JONES Any man as was a man—

MAGISTRATE Your conduct here has been most improper. You give the excuse that you were drunk when you stole the box. I tell you that is no excuse. If you choose to get drunk and break the law, afterwards you must take the consequences. And let me tell you that men like you, who get drunk and give way to your spite or whatever it is that's in you, are—a nuisance to the community.

JACK [*leaning from his seat*] Dad, that's what you said to me!

BARTHWICK Tsst!

[*There is a silence, while the MAGISTRATE consults his CLERK, JONES leans forward waiting*]

MAGISTRATE This is your first offence, and I am going to give you a light

sentence. [*Speaking sharply, but without expression*] One month with hard labour.

[*He bends, and parleys with his CLERK. The BALD CONSTABLE and another help JONES from the dock*]

JONES [*stopping and twisting round*] Call this justice? What about 'im? 'E got drunk! 'E took the purse—'e took the purse but [*in a muffled shout*] it's 'is money got 'im off—Justice!

[*The prisoner's door is shut on JONES, and from the seedy-looking men and women comes a hoarse and whispering moan*]

MAGISTRATE We will now adjourn for lunch! [*He rises from his seat*]

[*The Court is in a stir. ROPER gets up and speaks to the reporter JACK, throwing up his head, walks with a swagger through the corridor, BARTHWICK follows*]

MRS JONES [*turning to him with a humble gesture*] Oh! sir!—

[*BARTHWICK hesitates, then yielding to his nerves, he makes a shame-faced gesture of refusal, and hurries out of court. MRS JONES stands looking after him*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

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